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Wellbeing in Buganda: The Pursuit of a Good Life in Two Ugandan Villages

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PhD in Social Anthropology
The University of Edinburgh
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Declaration

This is to certify that the work contained within has been composed by me and is entirely my own work. No part of this thesis has been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed:

For Dad

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I offer a complex exploration of positive motivation and life evaluation in two adjacent villages in the Buganda kingdom of Central Uganda. Focusing primarily on the lives of five individuals, I examine the tensions and inconsistencies that arise in the day-to-day pursuit of a good life in these villages and argue that, while individual lives may differ, people everywhere face similar concerns in their desire to live well. Through these individuals, but drawing also on wider ethnographic insights, I explore five core themes, with a trajectory broadly moving from more material to more transcendental concerns. These are: making a living, aspiration, gratification deferral, the source of good things, and the importance of connectedness. Running through the thesis is the assertion that wellbeing is a relational and moral project as people's efforts to live well are inextricably intertwined. A key underlying question is 'How can we live well in a socially acceptable way?'

This research contributes to the fledgling field of the anthropology of happiness and wellbeing as well as regional scholarship on, for example, development, livelihoods, aspirations, and 'modernity'. In addition, it speaks to interdisciplinary wellbeing research and I argue that the nuance and contextualisation offered by anthropological and ethnographic study can both augment and challenge the primarily quantitative research from other disciplines. Furthermore, I make a particular claim for the value of biographical approaches to the study of wellbeing.

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GLOSSARY

I have included terms here generally without their initial vowel. Most appear here as they have appeared in the thesis. The first exception to this are verbs which in the thesis use the full infinitive (beginning *oku-*), but here begin just *ku-*, as they would be found in a dictionary. The other exceptions are *embeera ennungi*, *ensi empya*, and *obulamu obulungi*, which retain their initial vowel as throughout the thesis.

boda-boda. Motorbike taxi.

bugagga. Wealth.

See also: *mugagga*.

bulungi bwansi. ‘For the good of the country’. Communal work projects formerly organised by the administrative bodies of the Buganda kingdom.

buwaguzi. Success.

by’obuwangwa. Cultural or traditional things or practices.

embeera ennungi. Good life; good situation. I usually translate *embeera* as ‘situation’.

ensi empya. Literally ‘the new world’, which Jehovah’s Witnesses believe will follow Armageddon.

fitina. Jealousy.

ggwanga. Nation; tribe.

gomesi. The traditional colourful dress worn by women in Buganda. Usually they have smarter ones for special occasions, and more worn ones for everyday wear.

jjajja (pl. bajjajja). Grandparent; ancestor. Used also to refer to the spirits of deceased ancestors.

jjembe (pl. mayembe). Charm; fetish.

kabaka. King.

kanzu. The traditional floor-length white or cream robe of men in Buganda. Used primarily on formal occasions.

Katonda. The Creator; God.

kibanja (pl. bibanja). A form of customary land tenure in Buganda.

kiggwa (pl. biggwa). Family/clan burial site.

kika (pl. bika). Clan.

kisiraani (pl. bisiraani). Misfortune; bad luck.

kitiibwa. Respect.

kubeerawo. A verb meaning ‘to be there’, denoting something a little more than ‘to survive’.

kukola. To do; to work.

kulanya. The listing of one’s line of descent to demonstrate one’s position in the clan and lineage.

kulima. To dig. Used to refer to the work of agriculture.

kunyumirwa. To enjoy.

kusaba. To ask; to pray.

kusuubira. To hope; to expect.

kuzaala. To give birth. In Ugandan English this is usually translated as ‘to produce’.

kwabya lumbe. Literally ‘to demolish death’. The final funerary rites during which the heir (musika) is installed.

kwanjula. The traditional ‘introduction’ marriage ceremony when a man’s family visit the family of his new wife bearing the bride wealth.

lubaale (pl. balubaale). Powerful Buganda-wide ancestor spirits.

lumbe. See: *kwabya lumbe*.

mailo. A form of freehold land tenure in Buganda. The term comes from the English ‘mile’.

matooke. Green bananas – a staple food in Buganda.

mpewo (pl. mpewo). Literally ‘wind’, but used to refer to spirits.

See also: *jjajja, lubaale, musambwa, muzimu*.

mugagga (pl. bagagga). Wealthy person.

See also: *bugagga*.

Muganda (pl. Baganda). A person from Buganda.

mukisa (pl. mikisa). Blessing; luck. Used more commonly in the plural.

Mulokole (pl. Balokole). An adherent of the East African Revival, a Protestant renewal movement. Balokole means ‘saved people’.

Munyankole (pl. Banyankole). A person from the Ankole kingdom,

bordering Buganda to the south-west.

Munyarwanda (pl. Banyarwanda).
A person from Rwanda.

musawo muganda (pl. basawo baganda). Musawo is the Luganda word for any type of healer, traditional or medical. A musawo muganda refers to various kinds of traditional healer. Could variously be translated as witchdoctor, diviner.

musika (pl. basika). Heir.

Musoga (pl. Basoga). A person from the Busoga kingdom, bordering Buganda to the east.

musambwa (pl. misambwa).
Territorial spirits attached to features of the landscape.

mutwalo. Bridewealth. Mutwalo also means ‘bundle’.

muzeeyi (pl. bazeeyi). A respectful term for an elderly person.

muzimu (pl. mizimu). Ancestral ghost.

mwoyo (pl. myoyo). Soul.

obulamu obulungi. Good life. Obulamu also means ‘health’.

piki-piki. Motorbike.

ssanyu. Happiness.

ssabo (pl. massabo). Shrine.

waragi. A strong distilled alcoholic drink, often produced locally.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the everyday implications of attempting to live well for the inhabitants of two neighbouring villages in the Buganda kingdom of Central Uganda. It is essentially a thesis about three things and the dynamic links between them: concepts, pursuits, and ethics of wellbeing. Firstly, it is about individual and social conceptions of what it means to live well in these villages. What do people want, aspire to, value, and appreciate? Secondly, it is about the pursuit of a good life, about the ways in which villagers go about trying to achieve the kinds of lives they desire and about their ability to do so. Thirdly, beyond the questions of what to pursue and how to do so, villagers face an ethical question in their pursuit of living well. How can one attempt to improve life in a socially approved way? In examining these three things, it is the first major ethnographic work in eastern and southern Africa to take wellbeing as the primary focus of study.

A central problem of this thesis is the relationship between the *ability* to live well, or to pursue a good life, in terms of material, environmental, social, and structural affordances, and the *moral implications* of the paths people take in their attempts to do so. It is in the elaboration of this relationship and the consequences of it that I am able to say something applicable beyond the confines of these villages and Buganda. There are, of course, very real constraints people everywhere face on their ability to pursue the kinds of lives they desire, such as the availability of employment or adequate healthcare. Within these constraints, individuals and groups can theoretically do what they want in order to pursue their idea of a good life. However, this is where the moral considerations arise. While some activities and ways of pursuing wellbeing are socially approved, others are deemed morally problematic. In Buganda, I argue, the question of social approval depends largely on whether actions are believed to cause harm to others. The phrase ‘are believed to’ is key here. Partly this means that it is unproblematic to enhance your position so long as you are doing so in a socially benign

manner. However, it also means that when it is not clear from where a benefit or a gain comes then you potentially open yourself up to suspicion and jealousy.

In what follows, I argue that living well in Nabikakala and Bukula is a relational process. This is true for the ways in which wellbeing is conceptualised as well as how it is pursued. Ideas of a good life are dynamic and are shaped in relation to others, and pursuing these ideas requires a consideration for the interests and perceptions of others. Recognising that one's own wellbeing is intricately tied-up with the wellbeing of others is important not only in the context of these villages but also in the wider world. To do so encourages empathy and may ultimately allow greater numbers of people to more effectively live well.

BEGINNINGS

In 2009, I went to Uganda to spend six months with a small non-governmental organisation run by a group of people from the village of Nabikakala, about 100km from the capital, Kampala. I had briefly met one of the founders, Nyombi Ziwa, during my first short visit to the country in 2006. We stayed in touch and Nyombi told me more about their organisation. Boldly named The Global Coalition for Development and Welfare, or Codewe (pronounced Co-Day-Way) for short, their aims were grand, though their scope at the time was largely limited to the villages surrounding Nabikakala. Codewe's vision was 'To have a society developed with a socio-economically self-sustaining population that respects the rule of law and the rights of each and every individual, irrespective of colour, race, gender, birth, origin, ethnicity, religion, creed and aspirations', and their objectives included interests in health, the environment, water and sanitation, education, and agriculture. I was considering pursuing a career in international development and Codewe's ethos of sustainable development driven by local people was in line with my philosophy. Intrigued by my communications with Nyombi, I designed and maintained a website for the organisation and ran some fund-raising events. Somewhat dissatisfied with my

abilities from afar to get to know them effectively and to help the organisation develop, when the opportunity arose to return to Uganda for this six-month period I jumped at it.

On arrival in Uganda I found a small group of people running the organisation who, while keen and enthusiastic, were somewhat hamstrung by a lack of free time, as all were volunteers. The members of the executive committee all lived in Kampala, though most belonged to the same family from Nabikakala. As a result, I spent most of my time in the city, making a few brief visits to the village when their time permitted them to accompany me. I passed my time getting to know the city, learning some rudimentary Luganda, the dominant language of the region, conversing with two or three of the committee members, and working on the website in internet cafes. The organisation's incumbent chairman, Joseph Ziwa, Nyombi's brother, worked in marketing but also ran a small restaurant on the main thoroughfare through the city centre. A few times a week, I would spend the early evening sitting on the balcony overlooking Kampala Road, having some tea or a cold beer and chatting with Joseph. At one point towards the end of my stay in Uganda, Joseph said to me that the primary aim of Codewe was to 'help people live a happier life'. This seemingly throwaway statement piqued my anthropological curiosity. What exactly did Joseph mean? To what was he referring when he talked about a happy life? How was happiness conceptualised in Nabikakala, and just how possible was it to go about trying to improve it? Finally, is it even desirable to do so?

Of course, interests do not emerge from nowhere and I came to realise quite quickly that the intrigue Joseph's comment ignited in me was rooted in a trajectory of thinking over the previous years. I was interested in the purpose and aims of international development efforts. What is the goal of 'development'? What is 'progress'? What are we trying to achieve in life? Could it be that it is just about making people happy, as utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham might have it? Furthermore, Joseph's remark reminded me of conversations with Europeans coming back from Africa proclaiming their surprise that 'the people have so little but seem to be happy'.

From my own experience in the continent, I could understand how this impression could be created, but my scholarly and anthropological training generated a scepticism about the veracity of this. If people look like they are happy, is it because they really are? This perception also played on another developing concern in my own life around the importance of ‘stuff’ in many people’s attempts to live a good life. Why should it be surprising if people could be happy despite their material poverty? This project has also been a profoundly personal journey stemming from deep-rooted questions of how best to live my own life in a rapidly changing world. Joseph’s assertion of the aim of Codewe’s efforts being geared towards giving people a happier life encapsulated these threads in my thinking while opening up a plethora of further questions. It coalesced a number of general questions into a more specific concern. Whereas before I had wondered vaguely about these issues, Joseph’s statement motivated me to explore them by focusing on the concept of happiness in the specific context of the villages in which Codewe works.

In the days following my discussion with Joseph on Kampala Road, I had no idea where one brief remark would lead. It initiated a journey that has taken me to the submission of this thesis, a journey that began by turning to an exploration of what the existing literature on happiness could tell me. In the following sections, I look at some of the literature that helps inform this project and, through this, demonstrate the value of ethnographic study on wellbeing, and how this research fits into the wider literature of the region. I also discuss trends in anthropological literature on happiness and how my research contributes to these emerging themes.

HAPPINESS LITERATURE

Why anthropology?

Interest in happiness and wellbeing has grown rapidly in recent years in academia, in policy, and in popular media (just note the plethora of self-help literature).¹ The most

¹ Google Books Ngram Viewer indicates a rapid increase since around 1970 in the use of the

prolific academic disciplines in happiness research have typically been economics, social and positive psychology, and neuroscience. Anthropology has lagged behind in this area, perhaps somewhat surprising given it is rarely shy to tackle big and challenging topics. Neil Thin (2008, 2009) and to a lesser extent Jonathan Miles-Watson (2011) and Joel Robbins (2013) have discussed some of the reasons why this may be so. In particular, all three argue that anthropology has developed a preference for studying pathology or suffering. However, rather than dwell here on why anthropology has shown a reluctance to engage explicitly with wellbeing, I want to consider why the discipline is actually particularly well placed to offer some insights into conceptions and pursuits of wellbeing. Given the vast quantity of research on happiness and wellbeing in these other disciplines, summarising the literature is far beyond the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, I want to highlight a number of trends in order to demonstrate why anthropological research on wellbeing is so valuable. It should be noted however that there are some notable exceptions to these trends from sociology and development studies, often combining quantitative and qualitative methods, although these remain relatively few (e.g. Blackmore 2009; Copestake 2009; McGregor, Camfield, and Coulthard 2015; White 2009).

Firstly, most of this literature is primarily quantitative in approach. While some of the methods and indices involved are highly sophisticated, there is generally a lack of deep contextual understanding. In addition, attempting to ‘measure’ and put a number on happiness leads to reification and renders it understandable only as a fixed state rather than as something more processual. Various measures have attempted to quantify happiness or wellbeing in Uganda. For example, the Happy Planet Index gives a figure of 4.2/10 for ‘experienced well-being’ (placing it 125/151 countries) (Happy Planet Index 2012), and Ruut Veenhoven’s World Database of Happiness suggest an ‘average happiness’ of 4.5/10 between 2005-2014 (Veenhoven n.d.).

terms ‘wellbeing’ or ‘well-being’ in its electronic books. ‘Happiness’ saw a steady decline in use from a peak in the early 1820s, but its prevalence has rapidly picked up since the turn of this century.

Secondly, although interest in cross-cultural comparison is growing (Biswas-Diener, Vittersø, and Diener 2005; Copestake and Camfield 2009; Pflug 2008; Selin and Davey 2012; Veenhoven 2012), particularly between East Asian and Euro-American societies (Diener and Oishi 2004; Lu, Gilmour, and Kao 2001), empirical research overwhelmingly focuses on ‘western’ societies. Where research does go beyond this, often a distinction is drawn between ‘individualist’ and ‘collectivist’ societies (Deci and Ryan 2008; Diener and Oishi 2004; Layard 2003; Lu and Gilmour 2004; Suh 2000). At best, this distinction may just be overly simplistic. At worst, it stems from, or can lead to, ethnocentric conceptions of wellbeing. In both cases, it represents a neglect of the diverse ways in which wellbeing is understood and pursued.

Thirdly, quantifying happiness allows for ease of comparison, but distorts the kinds of comparisons that can be made. In policy terms, the value of easy comparison is clear, with standardised measures of wellbeing enabling policy makers to evaluate and affirm the effectiveness of their efforts and to demonstrate to stakeholders or an electorate the improvements their policies have yielded. Indeed, national governments including those of the UK (Evans, Macrory, and Randall 2015) and France (Stiglitz, Sen, and Fitoussi 2009) have taken an interest in measuring happiness or wellbeing, and Bhutan famously uses Gross National Happiness to evaluate and guide policy. Quantification also facilitates comparison between different groupings within society or cross-nationally/culturally. However, doing so masks potential differences in how happiness is understood, valued, pursued, or reported among these different groups. For example, there may be linguistic and conceptual differences in the understanding of ‘happiness’ among different groups of people, or even between individuals. Equally, cultural or religious norms may affect how people self-report their happiness.

Much anthropological work on happiness highlights the inadequacy of quantitative or seemingly ‘objective’ happiness research (Mathews 2012; Thin 2012a; Walker and Kavedžija 2015). Some aspects of quality of life can perhaps be effectively studied in this way, such as health or prosperity (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a: 5), but even then

the ways in which these are understood and the relative value placed upon them cannot be assumed. For example, as Alaka Wali asks in *American Anthropologist*, ‘Should health only be defined as being able to live as long as you can, or are relatively shorter life spans that are packed with meaningful experiences also acceptable for health measurement?’ (in Johnston et al. 2012: 12). Fredrik Barth has explained how quality of life assessment has tended to favour objectively measurable indicators, such as life expectancy and school enrolment, in an attempt to provide a ‘view from nowhere’ (1999: 97), thereby permitting comparison across settlements, regions, or countries or over time. But how can quality of life be evaluated from outside, without taking into consideration how people themselves evaluate their lives?

Anthropologists have argued that happiness cannot be effectively studied objectively and that differing cultural and linguistic conceptions make it difficult to compare cross-culturally (Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a: 5). The economist Richard Layard (2003: 17) denies that such differences have any impact on happiness self-reports, but the linguist Anna Wierzbicka (2004) eloquently counters that language differences preclude direct comparison of happiness ratings.

Putting these translatability issues aside, while people may almost universally be able to give a numerical rating to how they feel about their life (Thin 2012a), this does not help us to understand the context of this rating. If two people, one from Scotland and one from Uganda, both rate their life as 6 out of 10, what has led to this? Can we conclude that they are equally happy? How could we improve the rating? Should that even be an aim? Numbers alone do not allow us to understand the socio-cultural nuances of how happiness is understood, valued, and pursued.

Developing an understanding of this context benefits greatly from ethnography. Explanations of wellbeing are difficult to tie down and can only take us so far. Ask anyone ‘what makes you happy?’ and they will likely be able to list a few activities or situations that they enjoy. People can think they know what will make them happy, yet may not actively try to achieve this. They may describe how they would like their lives to be in a few years’ time, yet their actions do not consistently help them move towards

this imagined future. And, even when people achieve the things they want, they may discover it does not make them happy – as psychologists have pointed out, our ‘affective forecasting’ skills are often poor (Dunn et al. 2007; Wilson and Gilbert 2005). Charles Stafford (2015) has recently drawn on the concept of affective forecasting to show how, in rural China and Taiwan, this is relational and intergenerational. He argues that people here are concerned with predicting and acting with respect to how they think others will feel, and notes that people are not particularly good at this relational affective forecasting either.

Ethnographic approaches to wellbeing allow us to develop in-depth, nuanced understandings of the ways in which people in particular contexts understand and pursue wellbeing. It can help us explore the complexity of happiness and how it affects the lives of those we study, with a view to comprehending how people’s efforts to live well may be facilitated. In light of this contention, in the following section I go on to consider some of the contributions anthropology is already making to wellbeing research, and how my research builds on these contributions. As well as the explicitly wellbeing-oriented literature, I also look here at how the themes discussed fit in with other regional scholarship.

Happiness in anthropology

Recent years have seen some promising growth of anthropological interest in happiness and wellbeing. Volumes edited by Salmomé Berthon et al. (2009), Alberto Corsín Jiménez (2008), and Gordon Mathews and Carolina Izquierdo (2009b), as well as a recent special issue of *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (edited with an introduction by Harry Walker and Iza Kavedžija (2015)) are an indication of this.

These have been followed by a number of book-length ethnographies including Melania Calestani (2013) looking at wellbeing among rural-to-urban migrants in El Alto, Bolivia; and Edward Fischer (2014) exploring aspirations, dignity, and purpose in the pursuit of wellbeing in Germany and Guatemala. Michael Jackson’s *Life within Limits* (2011), based on long-term fieldwork among the Kuranko in Sierra Leone,

argues that people everywhere are ‘haunted by a sense of insufficiency and loss’ (p. xi), something he calls ‘existential discontent’. Jackson describes wellbeing as the possession of existential power and contends that wellbeing is universally about learning how to live within contextually variable limits. Finally, Paul Stoller (2014) discusses the quest for wellbeing through comparing his own life with that of one man from his fieldwork in Niger and New York. Notable earlier ethnographies include Naomi Adelson’s (2000) study of ‘being alive well’ among the James Bay Cree, and Mathews’ (1996) exploration of ‘what makes life worth living’ in Japan and the United States. In addition, a prominent piece in *American Anthropologist’s* Vital Topics Forum (Johnston et al. 2012) is indicative of the recent growth of anthropological interest in happiness. This article features contributions from various anthropologists discussing the question ‘What do anthropologists have to say about happiness?’

So what *do* anthropologists have to offer happiness research? Why should anthropology be interested in the topic? And why should other disciplines be interested in anthropological contributions? There are a number of key themes and early trends emergent in this literature which provide some insight into wellbeing, and which indicate potentially fruitful areas of further anthropological study. Firstly, in addition to thinking of wellbeing as a state, it is helpful to consider the processes involved in attempting to live well. Secondly, a firm understanding of context is needed. This includes developing an emic understanding of wellbeing – an approach that helps to avoid potentially ethnocentric conceptions of wellbeing. Thirdly, anthropological research is effective at exploring the complexities of individual and social wellbeing and can provide an antidote to the crude distinction made between individualist and collectivist societies evident in much of the cross-cultural happiness literature from disciplines such as economics and psychology. Finally, anthropological attempts to understand wellbeing can be enhanced by looking at values. In particular, we ought to consider wellbeing itself as a value and to explore its importance relative to other values. At the end of this section, I offer some comments on the prevalence of pathological scholarship.

Wellbeing as process

Sara Ahmed (2010) argues that as well as considering what happiness *is*, it is productive to look at what it *does*. It is not enough to see happiness or wellbeing as a state but we ought to also consider it as a process, or as a ‘field of struggle’ (Jackson 2011: ix). This approach is evident in the work of a number of anthropologists looking at the topic. For example, for Aboriginals in New South Wales, Daniela Heil describes ‘being well’ as a dynamic, continually evolving concept emerging through ‘people’s interactions with each other and with the multifaceted broader environment’ (2009: 94). Drawing on work by David Buchanan, she describes wellbeing as ‘a process of becoming, realized through living well and engaging in social practices that embody the values people wish to bring into being’ (Heil 2009: 96). This notion of becoming is reflected in Nigel Rapport’s work with hospital porters in Scotland. He suggests the term ‘well-becoming’ to encompass life as a ‘trajectory: a continuous movement between moments of being, an experience of betweenness, of transition and becoming’ (2008: 96). Work from Adelson (2000, 2009), Izquierdo (2009), and Sarah C. White (2009) also emphasises the processual nature of wellbeing. People do not live their lives as a series of moments (although see the discussion below on the episodic and diachronic self), but in a continual process of becoming, with a trajectory from the past, through the present, and into the future. By attempting to measure wellbeing, research from other disciplines tries to ‘capture’ wellbeing at a given point in time. I and other anthropologists, on the other hand, see value in developing a fuller understanding of the trajectories involved in people’s attempts to live well.

This idea that wellbeing is best understood as a process is reflected in Hoyt Alverson’s (1978) fascinating work among the Tswana in which he discusses conceptions of success, wanting, and achievement as being processual, suggesting that there is no conceptual difference between means and ends. With reference to the Tswana ‘great works’ of building one’s name, doing agriculture, and building a family and home he explains that ‘to be doing these is to be a content and fulfilled individual’ (p. 122).

Furthermore, there is a developing literature in East Africa concerning the processes involved in people's attempts to improve their lives. Much of this scholarship relates to discourse on 'modernity' or 'development', examining the ways in which people pursue these ideas and the tensions arising from this pursuit. For instance, in Dar es Salaam, men's desires to appear 'modern' by remaining monogamous, and also to have multiple wives and families, leads to polygyny continuing, but in secret (Lewinson 2006). Some of these works paint detailed pictures of the ways in which people attempt to improve their lives. They include James H. Smith's study of the competing ways residents of a village in Kenya appropriated the appearance of a python-spirit as a way to shape the future in their own interests (2006); children in Kinshasa taking to the streets as child-witches in order to escape parental authority and consume material goods through stolen and earned money (De Boeck 2004); and the formation of women's groups to empower women to actively reshape their future (Abusharaf 2009; Mercer 2002).

In addition, other research highlights the disillusionment many feel with the results of 'modernisation'. The classic work here is James Ferguson's *Expectations of Modernity* (1999). Other work explores how young Luo in northern Tanzania want to profit from modernity, yet remain concerned about their complicity in the moral breakdown they see being generated by this pursuit (Dilger 2003), and the feelings of loss and decline felt by Luo in western Kenya (Geissler and Prince 2010). These sentiments, Geissler and Prince say, can be seen in ethnographic accounts across Africa. More positively, some research critiques ideas of a singular teleology of modernity arguing that the ways people engage with ideas of modernity necessarily hybridise with traditional values to create 'bushy' (Ferguson 1999: 80), 'modernities' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). Similarly, Richard Werbner (2002) argues against there being an evolution of a particular, 'modern', subjectivity in post-colonial Africa.

Like the more explicitly wellbeing-oriented literature above, these examples are a further demonstration of the importance of looking at the processes involved in people's attempts to live well and to create a good life for themselves. This is my aim

in the ethnographic chapters that follow.

An emic understanding and the importance of context

What all anthropological wellbeing research has in common is the goal of understanding wellbeing from the point of view of the people they study. Terms such as ‘happiness’ or ‘wellbeing’ can be difficult to pin down and it is possible to argue that such concepts may be, at least to some extent, ethnocentric. One key way in which a number of scholars have dealt with this issue is to focus their research on local concepts or terms. In her work among the James Bay Cree, Adelson (2000, 2009) explores the concept of *miyupimaatisiun*, which she translates as ‘being alive well’. In a similar vein, Izquierdo (2009) notes the term *shinetagantsi* among the Matsigenka in Peru. This translates roughly as ‘happiness’, and embodies the ‘ideas and ideals of what the Matsigenka consider the basic premise of a good life’ (p. 68). Gordon Mathews (1996, 2006, 2009) argues for the need for a ‘way in’ to study wellbeing, due to the difficulty of studying the experience of happiness. Rather than research the concept of wellbeing itself, he focuses on an exploration of the Japanese concept of the *ikigai*, or ‘that which makes life worth living’.

In a similar manner, scholars such as David W. Gegeo (1998) and Maia Green (2000) have looked at local concepts pertaining to ‘development’. A little further removed conceptually, are Mikael Karlström’s (1996) engaging exploration of *eddembe ery’omuntu*, or ‘democracy’, in Buganda, and Anne Lewinson’s (2006) examination of *tamaa* (‘greed/lust’) in Dar es Salaam. While my research does not adopt such an approach as the central organisational method, I nonetheless drew significant inspiration from this literature and I spent much time in the field exploring a variety of local terms and concepts.

Furthermore, and related to this, anthropological research on wellbeing emphasises and demonstrates the need to explore and present a rich insight into the socio-cultural context in order to help make sense of how people feel about their lives; what they value, desire, aspire to, and pursue; and the ways in which they attempt to

live well. In the conclusion to *Pursuits of Happiness*, Mathews and Izquierdo argue that even if this is all anthropology does for happiness studies then this is a major contribution (2009c: 259).

Individual and collective wellbeing

As I pointed out above, there is a tendency in some of the comparative, ‘cross-cultural’, literature from economics or psychology to label societies as either ‘individualist/egocentric’ or ‘collectivist/sociocentric’ and then to see wellbeing as contingent on this structure (for example Diener and Oishi 2004; Layard 2003; Lu and Gilmour 2004; Suh 2000; Uchida, Norasakkunkit, and Kitayama 2004). Anthropologists, unsurprisingly, have challenged the value of such characterisations (Clark 2009: 203; Izquierdo 2009: 86). While there may be societies in which concepts of wellbeing lean towards more collective or individual notions, the distinction is not clear-cut. Instead, there is always a complex relationship between individual wants and desires and collective obligations and responsibilities. Examples of work exploring the tension between personal wants and aspirations and the bind of social conventions and expectations include Steve Darné (2009) among men of a merchant caste in India, and Calestani (2008, 2013) in Bolivia.

My experience in Uganda was very similar, and other ethnographic literature from Africa, and among other Bantu societies, highlights the artificiality of a firm distinction between collectivism and individualism. John Beattie (1980: 314) and Willy De Craemer (1983: 22) argue that while social relations are key in notions of African selfhood, people are very much aware of themselves as separate beings. John and Jean Comaroff (2001: 276) echo this claim and make a distinction between ‘individuality’, which is everywhere in Africa, and ‘individualism’, which is more akin to western conceptions and is perhaps rarer in Africa. This notion of the self as an individual deeply embedded in the social context is evident in the Ganda practice of *okulanya*, the listing of one’s ancestors during a formal introduction in order to place oneself in a lineage. The practice is similar to that noted by Meyer Fortes (1987: 283)

among the Tallensi, and Beattie (1980: 314) among the Banyoro in Uganda. In addition, this relational self can be seen in how people in Buganda are rarely referred to or addressed by name, but rather in relation to others. Examples include Taata Andrew (father of John), Mukyala Maka (wife of Maka), or Muzeeyi (a respectful term for an elderly person).

The value of values

A promising emerging theme from anthropological wellbeing research has been an attempt to link it to the study of values. In their introduction to the recent *Hau* special issue on happiness and values, Walker and Kavedžija (2015: 7) note three interlinked connections between the two. Firstly, happiness itself is valued differently in different cultural contexts. Secondly, happiness is an evaluative notion, concerned with assessing your life or how you feel about it. And thirdly, happiness becomes meaningful in relation to cultural values. The authors in the collection explore a number of different values related to happiness, including virtue and secularism among Humanists in the UK (Engelke 2015), balance and harmony in Japan (Kavedžija 2015), and prosperity and familial togetherness among Bangladeshi migrants (Gardner 2015). Additionally, Fischer (2014) has recently written about wellbeing in relation to both economic and moral values. Robbins (2015) has attempted to theorise the link between happiness and values, drawing on Weber, Durkheim, Goffman, and others. He says, ‘A good life will be one in which social relations often tend to go well, to be oriented to and disclosive of important values, and therefore to produce a reasonable amount of effervescent happiness that can carry a person forward into the future’ (p. 226).

One benefit of anthropological engagement in the nexus between happiness and values is that it offers a way to engage with other disciplines. The highly influential capability/ies approach (e.g. Nussbaum 2000; Nussbaum and Sen 1993; Sen 1993, 1999) is deeply concerned with values, and Martha Nussbaum suggests a list of ten universal values, or central human capabilities (2000: 78–80). Other disciplines, too, have displayed an interest in values, for example in psychology (Diener and Oishi

2004; Lu, Gilmour, and Kao 2001) and philosophy (Bloomfield 2014; Kazez 2007; Tiberius 2004).

In this thesis, I look at values and valued goods in my field site and how these connect to the pursuit of a good life. In doing so, the project fits in with the work above, but also research from Uganda such as Janet Seeley et al.'s (1996) investigation into the goods needed to 'be able to cope'; Nancy Neiman Auerbach's (2012) analysis of the values driving a fair trade coffee cooperative in eastern Uganda; and Kristen E. Cheney's (2007) study of children's views on the relative 'good' of life in rural and urban Uganda.

Suffering and social pathology

In his influential book *Sick Societies*, Robert Edgerton (1992) contended that, as a result of strong cultural relativist positions, anthropologists have probably under-represented suffering and discontent in small-scale societies. Thin has made a very similar argument, that the doctrine of cultural relativism has led anthropology to become largely non-evaluative and therefore to display a reluctance to study happiness or human flourishing (2005: 9–10). In the same paper, Thin claims a further factor limiting social scientific interest in happiness is its apparent normality. He argues that happiness for most people is a default, unmarked category (2005: 11), and research showing that most people, most of the time, rate their subjective wellbeing above neutral seems to support this (Biswas-Diener, Vittersø, and Diener 2005; Veenhoven 2012). In apparent contrast to Edgerton, however, Thin concludes that anthropologists have focused more on suffering and pathology than on wellbeing (2005: 11; also Robbins 2013). Both may be right; there does appear to be more study of suffering than of wellbeing, but perhaps this still under-represents the reality of suffering in the societies in which anthropologists study.

In Uganda, there is a clear predominance of pathological topics, including health and illness, particularly HIV/AIDS (Mogensen 2009; Mutabazi-Mwesigire et al. 2014; Wallman 1996; Whyte et al. 2004), and poverty and struggle (Finnström 2008;

Frankland 2007; McGee 2004). Nonetheless, through such studies, messages emerge about the desire or pursuit of wellness or a better life. While I frame my thesis in more positive terms than many other studies, I nevertheless find it productive to draw also on more pathological themes, including death, poverty, illness, and misfortune, in order to further my understanding of wellbeing. Suffering and wellbeing are closely intertwined. Just as they cannot be experienced in total isolation, neither can they be studied so. Furthermore, as Todd Kashdan and Robert Biswas-Diener (2014) have recently claimed, negative emotions, or what they call our ‘dark side’, have productive and positive functions. Similarly, for example, it is through experiencing relative poverty that relative wealth attains its value.

Regional literature

While no other study in East Africa has attempted to explore happiness and wellbeing to the extent I do here, or as Michael Jackson has done in Sierra Leone, there are nevertheless a number of studies with important things to say on these topics. Some of these contributions are more incidental, made in the course of other research, and use the terms largely uncritically. For instance, Karen Tranberg Hansen (2000) has noted the importance of the second-hand clothing market for the wellbeing of Zambians, and De Craemer (1983) has written of the way personhood in central Africa is embedded in a network of relations with those living and dead and the benefits this brings for wellbeing. In her book *African Voices, African Lives*, Pat Caplan (1997) talks about happiness for her main interlocutor, Mohammed, resulting from his being circumcised (p. 37) and how ‘spirits bring no happiness’ (p. 190). And, in Mozambique, Harry G. West has noted how sorcerers ‘feed-off’ the wellbeing of others (1997: 16).

Others engage in greater depth, such as Beattie’s (1963) study of sorcery in Bunyoro, where he describes the threat to public wellbeing from sorcerers and the *mbandwa* cult concerned with preserving it. Frederick Klaitz (2005) has written about the ways people in Botswana (outside East Africa, but nevertheless Bantu like Buganda) mediate their behaviour and displays of emotion in order to safeguard the

wellbeing of others. And Theodore Trefon (2004) talks about the ‘pursuit’ or ‘quest for well-being’ in Kinshasa, though never explains what he means by ‘well-being’. In the same book as Trefon, Peter Persyn and Fabienne Ladrière expand on Kinois conceptions of wellbeing, explaining that it is closely linked to health, but understood, like the World Health Organization description of health, ‘as a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease’ (2004: 73). Finally, Paul Wenzel Geissler and Ruth Jane Prince engage with the idiom of ‘growth’ in western Kenya, ‘in which the well-being of cosmic and social worlds, the fertility of the land and its inhabitants, people and animals, living and dead, form an interconnected whole’ (2010: 9). They go on throughout the book to highlight various ‘sources’ of and influences on people’s wellbeing.

In Buganda, medical anthropologist Sandra Wallman (1996) has researched wellbeing among women suffering from AIDS in Kampala although, despite having the term ‘wellbeing’ in the title, her book is concerned more with *ill*-being than *well*-being. Karlström’s (2004) work offers a helpful exploration of collective aspiration in Buganda in two periods in the 20th century, but leaves space for a more contemporary look at Ganda aspirations. And historian Neil Kodesh (2008, 2010) tells how traditionally, especially before colonialism and the influence of world religions, a network of clan shrines provided foci for clan members to come together and, with the help of local spiritual entities, seek solutions to collective problems. Kodesh makes the argument that collective wellbeing and public healing is in fact the basis for Ganda clanship. This is reflected in the work of Elialilia S. Okello and Seggane Musisi who explain how, when presented with a list of the most common symptoms of depression, the Baganda they interviewed would describe the ailment as *ebyekika*, or ‘clan problems/illness’ (2006: 204). These problems refer to the ability of deceased ancestors to cause problems or illness – something that was reflected in my fieldwork.

Other work has looked at concepts of wealth, which, as we shall see, emerged as an important aspect of *embeera ennungi* (a good life) in my research. Susan Reynolds Whyte, working among the Nyole in Eastern Uganda, notes that their term for poverty,

obutahi, translates as ‘being without relatives’ (1997: 54), and the word *ichan* among the Teso (also in Eastern Uganda) conveys a similar meaning, and contrasts with their conception of wealth, which includes people alongside cattle, land, and money (Meinert 2009: 110). In Buganda, Philip L. Kilbride writes about how a prosperous household traditionally was one that included many wives and children and large gardens (1979: 234), and Abasi Kiyimba expands our understanding by explaining the valuing of female offspring as a source of material wealth and potential social mobility for families if she marries well (2005). I discuss wealth in greater detail in Chapter 1, but it is worth noting that from my research the term used for wealth, *bugagga*, referred more to material wealth than ‘wealth in people’.

Finally, Sverker Finnström’s work in northern Uganda (2008), manages to retain a somewhat optimistic tone, despite the torrid time the Acholi have faced with war, reminding us that people struggle for *piny maber*, or ‘good surroundings’. They do not merely wait for things to improve, but are active in the present, building for the future, reminiscent of Whyte’s description of the ‘spirit of meliorism’ among the Nyole (1997: 232). *Piny maber* requires life to be in balance, secure, and comprehensible. However, what this consists of varies between people. For older people it involves cattle herds and for young people to marry, whereas for the younger generation these needs are supplemented with a desire for higher education opportunities and democracy (Finnström 2008: 10–11).

In summary, my research builds on anthropological interest in wellbeing by exploring how the process of attempting to live well plays out in this particular context, and explicating the concepts of wellbeing that exist there. It provides a counter-point to the literature from other disciplines and further demonstrates the value that in-depth, qualitative ethnographic research can add to wider wellbeing research. In addition, it complements other work in Uganda and the wider region that focuses on the agency of people in creating the kinds of lives they want to live.

A NOTE ON TERMS

Before going any further, it is worth addressing the issue of terminology. I did not begin this project with a definition of happiness in mind, but knew I wanted to investigate the ways in which people in Nabikakala and Bukula evaluate their lives and how (and whether) they attempt to improve them. Following Thin, I see words like ‘happiness’ as denoting a ‘rubric’ or ‘conversation’ (2012b) indicating a general area of study, much like ‘religion’ or ‘kinship’. Walker and Kavedžija go as far as to argue that ‘happiness’ as a term ‘acquires its power precisely from its elusive definition’ (2015: 14). I approach happiness in this project much as Paul Riesman approached freedom in his:

I did not start out with a definition of freedom and then look to see whether the Fulani have it. Rather, what I have tried to do is discover what concepts of freedom, if any, the Fulani have in their language, what concepts are implicit in their everyday actions, what their experience of freedom is like, how freedom is maintained or curtailed in social life, and how these aspects of freedom can be related to social structure, technology, and environment. (1977: 2)

I retain a belief that the term ‘happiness’ has value because it is so subjective and means something to everyone. However, over the course of this research I have gradually shifted to finding the term ‘wellbeing’ more analytically useful (although I also use ‘good life’ or ‘living well’ synonymously with wellbeing). Interestingly this shift from happiness to wellbeing is one the founder of the positive psychology movement, Martin Seligman, found himself making (2011: 13–14), and also that Mathews and Izquierdo make in the first pages of *Pursuits of Happiness* (2009a: 1–2). Part of my reason for this was the realisation that the Luganda term most closely matching happiness (*ssanyu*) has ended up figuring rarely in my thesis. To an extent this is a result of the methodological difficulty of researching happiness ethnographically, but is also due to a recognition that ‘wellbeing’ more effectively connotes something beyond personal subjectivity. I found that when I tell people I study happiness they tend to initially consider emotion (as Seligman too notes (2011: 13)), whereas my interests are far broader than this.

Ethnographically I therefore restrict my use of the terms ‘happiness’ or ‘happy’

to those times when a Muganda would use the corresponding terms *ssanyu* or *musanyufu*, when indicating an emotion or feeling. While in English it makes sense to speak of ‘a happy life’ this does not follow in Luganda where ‘*obulamu obusanyufu*’ would not make sense. The only other time I use ‘happiness’ in the thesis is when referring to literature which uses this term.

Though quite long, I find the definition Mathews and Izquierdo arrive at for wellbeing encapsulates how I think of the concept:

Well-being is an optimal state for an individual, community, society, and the world as a whole. It is conceived of, expressed, and experienced in different ways by different individuals and within the cultural contexts of different societies: different societies may have distinctly different culturally shaped visions of well-being. Nonetheless, well-being bears a degree of commonality due to our common humanity and interrelatedness over space and time. Well-being is experienced by individuals – its essential locus lies within individual subjectivity – but it may be considered and compared interpersonally and interculturally, since all individuals live within particular worlds of others, and all societies live in a common world at large. (2009a: 5)

THE FIELD

Nabikakala village is at the end of the road – go any farther and you end up picking your way through the swamp. Those who know the way can make it through to the adjacent village of Kiragga during the dry season, but still have to contend with the thorny bush. For the rest of us it is about an eight-kilometre detour. When you travel this dirt track Nabikakala (Figure 0-1) seamlessly blends into Bukula (Figure 0-2), which morphs into Lugalama, until, five kilometres from Nabikakala, you reach Kiti, a trading centre on the slightly wider dirt track leading north, deep into Kalungu District. Head south instead and, after about fifteen minutes on the back of a motorbike taxi, you are in the town of Lukaya – a medium-sized town on the main road from Kampala towards the south-west, Tanzania, and Rwanda. Lukaya is memorable largely for its host of blue-aproned food and drink hawkers thronging around any vehicle stopping within their vicinity to offer grilled meat on sticks, roast *gonja* bananas, chapatis, and sodas. Lukaya is ‘town’: the nearest electricity, the Friday market, the closest high school, and the slightly larger shops – the place to go when

you want to buy seeds, a new shirt, or a mobile phone.

I spent my time mostly in Nabikakala and Bukula, although I would sometimes go as far as Kiti, or farther afield if accompanying an acquaintance on a visit. Nabikakala itself, the village in which I lived throughout my fieldwork, was dominated by big landowners (generally with decades of residency in the village) and cattle farming. Bukula was of a slightly different character, the land having been divided up into smaller sections, and the houses noticeably closer together. The majority of people here do not actually own their land, but are *kibanja* holders on land technically owned by someone else (I include an overview of land tenure in Chapter 2). Nonetheless, many have lived on the same land for twenty or thirty years or more. The two villages have quite distinct characters, although unless you know where the boundary lies you may never know you are entering a different village. This is the same throughout this region – homesteads scattered over the gentle ridges, interspersed with swampy areas which are largely impossible to live or farm in, pockmarked by the odd trading centre of clustered homes and traders. In fact, Nabikakala and Bukula are in different sub-counties, the third level of local administration, although this makes virtually no perceptible difference in everyday life. The Local Council (LC) system in Uganda is a tiered system of decentralised governance. It comprises Local Councils at the village (LC1), parish (LC2), sub-county (LC3), county (LC4), and district (LC5) levels. At the village level, the residents elect a nine-member committee. For further discussion on the LC system see for example (Devas and Grant 2003; Green 2008; Karlström 1996).

I had been in touch with Nyombi Ziwa prior to arriving in Uganda to arrange going to live with his parents in Nabikakala, and in my first week in the country, I went with him and two siblings to the village to speak directly with the elderly couple. My memories of them from my previous visits to the country were of a smiling, kind-hearted woman and an old man with an amazing presence who seemed to command respect with every facet of his being. On my arrival in Nabikakala, Nyombi's mother was just as I remembered her, but his father was somewhat diminished having been

struck down by cancer. The gravitas when he spoke remained, but his body had begun to look much weaker than the strong man I remembered.

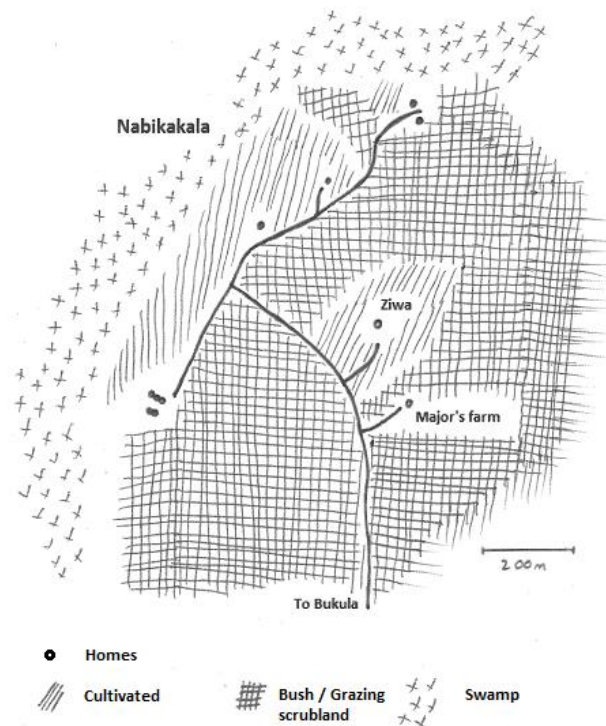


Figure 0-1: Map of Nabikakala, showing homes and land use

I lived with this couple, Epaphroditus Ziwa and Kobusingye Ziwa, for my entire time in Nabikakala. They quickly became like surrogate parents to me, with the extension that their sons and daughters came to feel like brothers and sisters and I would make a point of seeing as many of them as possible on my visits to Kampala. I called Kobusingye ‘Maama’. Her husband I called ‘Muzeeyi’, the honorific title for an elderly person though more commonly used for men. In this thesis, I refer to him as (Muzeeyi) Ziwa and her as Kobusingye. At times, there were just three of us but visits from relatives were common, sometimes for weeks at a time. During December and January, a number of grandchildren came to stay for the school holidays, and for six months we had the three young daughters of Ziwa’s son Frank staying with us.

By village standards the Ziwa family were relatively wealthy, largely by virtue of the success of Ziwa's children working in Kampala, Entebbe (a major town and home to Uganda's international airport), and internationally. Ziwa owned more than sixty acres of *mailo* land in Nabikakala, meaning that he owned it outright – something very difficult for most people. Furthermore, they lived in one of the largest houses in the area, constructed by Nyombi, a trained mason. This relative wealth stemmed from the parents' efforts to ensure their children were well educated, to at least the completion of secondary school. Of course, the ability to do this and to buy such a large tract of land required a certain level of existing wealth, and his work for the government over a number of decades had enabled him to earn a decent salary. I was concerned about how attaching myself to this family may lead to me being perceived in the community, but I found the Ziwa family to be largely well respected, and the insights I gained from my stay with them proved valuable.

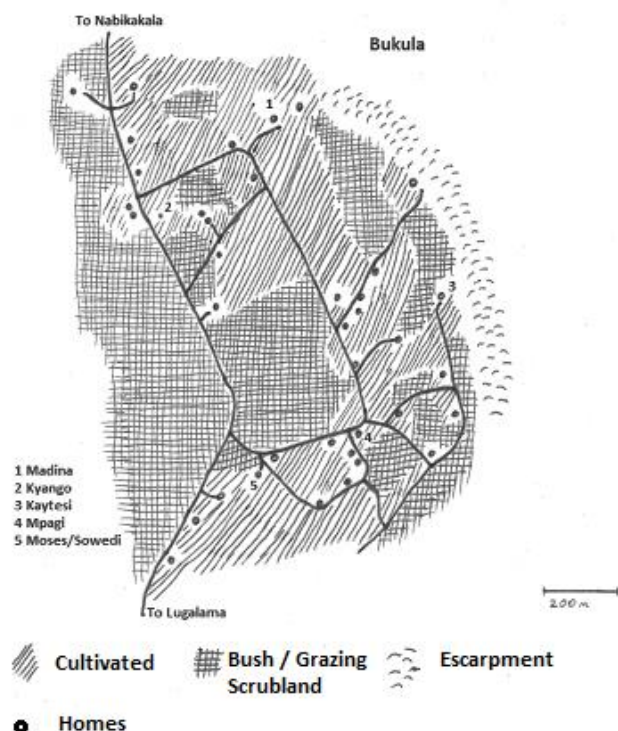


Figure 0-2: Map of Bukula, showing homes and land use

In total, I spent fifteen months in Uganda. I typically spent between four to eight weeks at a time in the villages before trips to Kampala or elsewhere to rest, process my notes, and access the internet. I generally spent the mornings doing tasks around the home, either working on my notes or helping with some chores. After lunch, I went out to speak to people in the villages, before coming home just before dusk to write my field notes, illuminated by my solar lamp. I was strongly advised not to go out after dark due in part to concerns over the dangers posed by potentially unscrupulous villagers, and partly to the *bazezi*, or night-dancers – witches believed to disinter and eat corpses, dance naked in the night, and cause illness and misfortune (Beattie 1963: 29–30; Van Duijl 2005).

I spent the largest part of my time in Bukula. There were various reasons for this, but it caused me to be frequently castigated by the other residents of Nabikakala for not visiting the people ‘from my village’ frequently enough. Nabikakala was usually very quiet, due to the relatively small number of households and the dispersed settlement pattern. It was therefore sometimes difficult to find someone to talk to, and there was little ‘action’. Often, not a whole lot more would be happening in Bukula, but at least there was more inter-house contact. Finally, as in any village, there were constant disagreements, of various magnitudes, between the households. I did not want to be seen to be taking sides and so, as I was staying with a family and subsequently seen as somewhere between lodger and surrogate family-member, spending my time a little farther from this home allowed me to limit my involvement in any of these neighbourly disputes.

Demographics and the make-up of the villages

Nabikakala and Bukula are each, in a number of respects, very diverse villages. Nabikakala is slightly less so due to the dominance of a few big landowners, almost all of whom are Baganda. Even in Bukula the Baganda dominate, but reflecting a long history of immigration in Buganda (see also Richards 1966: 13, 23) there are large numbers of Banyarwanda (from Rwanda), along with a significant proportion of

Barundi (from Burundi), Banyankole (from the Ankole kingdom neighbouring Buganda), and other peoples, mostly from central, west, and south-west Uganda. Catholicism is the most prevalent religion, but with large minorities of Muslims, Protestants, and Pentecostal Christians. There are massive landowners, and landless labourers working for little more than food and shelter. There are people who have lived their whole lives in the village, others who have returned after time in the city or elsewhere, and others who migrated there during my fieldwork. Some are embedded in wider local kinship networks, while others are there either on their own or with a partner and children.

Table 0-1, below, shows the percentages of the predominant ethnicities and religions for the parishes (LC2) of Kiragga (of which Nabikakala is part) and Kiti (for Bukula). The data is taken from the last census (2002) for which full data is available. A Uganda Bureau of Statistics report (2012) for Kalungu District (LC5) indicated a population in 2009 for Nabikakala of 66, and Bukula of 230.

		Kiragga	Kiti
Ethnicity	Baganda	63 %	67 %
	Banywarwanda	14 %	7 %
	Other Rwandan	5 %	6 %
	Banyankole	7 %	10 %
	Barundi	7 %	4 %
Religion	Catholic	46 %	50 %
	Protestant	15 %	15 %
	Muslim	28 %	32 %
	Pentecostal	5 %	2 %

*Table 0-1: Ethnicity and religion in Kiragga and Kiti parishes,
(Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2002)*

Households could also be diverse. Most would include a couple and children. A few men had a second (or even third) wife, although in all but one case they maintained separate households. Parents would never live in the same house as their married offspring as a result of the Ganda *obuko* taboo, described by A.F. Robertson as a ‘mortal dread’ surrounding the pollution of sexual activities in the proximity of one’s

parents (1996: 601). However, they would often live nearby. Commonly an elderly individual or couple would live with one or more grandchildren in an arrangement that suited both the grandparents and the parents (there is a strong link in Buganda between grandparents and grandchildren (see for example Cheney 2007: 149–150; Summers 2005)). It is undesirable for a person to live alone, partly for reasons of safety but also due to the importance of intra-household cooperation in daily tasks. Nonetheless, there were a few individuals in Nabikakala and Bukula, only men in my experience, who did live alone. Education levels are low, with only a few individuals having continued their education through secondary school. In 2009, in Lwabenge sub-county (LC3), containing Nabikakala, only 10% of the population over five years old had attained secondary education (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2012: 8) (although this statistic is slightly misleading given it includes a high proportion of the population not yet old enough to have done so). Many of those who do receive secondary education subsequently move to Kampala to look for work or, in rare cases, further study.

A note on language

The principal language spoken in the villages is Luganda, a Bantu language with similarities to a number of other languages in the region. For many, Luganda is not their first language. Therefore, it was common to hear groups of people speaking in other languages, in particular Lusoga, Runyankole, or Lunyarwanda. Luganda, however, operates as something of a *lingua franca*.

I spent some time with a high school English teacher during my first month in Uganda studying some of the basics of Luganda, although most of my language learning took place in the village through a combination of J.D. Chesswas' *Essentials of Luganda* (1954), a Luganda-English Dictionary, and practice. I reached a level whereby I could confidently converse with my interlocutors however, for many of the more in-depth conversations, working with my assistant, Moses, allowed the conversation to flow more smoothly.

Luganda is a language built on word stems with various prefixes and suffixes

denoting tense, person, and noun-class. The stem *-ganda* pertains to the ethnic group, with *Baganda* denoting people in the plural (as well as the group as a whole), while *Muganda* indicates one person. *Luganda* is the language and *Buganda* is the kingdom. I have used the same conventions for other ethnic groups, e.g. *Basoga*, *Lunyarwanda*, *Munyankole*. Adjectives in Luganda have a number of different prefixes depending on the ‘class’ of the noun in question. For clarity and simplicity in this thesis, apart from the terms noted above, I will use the anglicised word ‘Ganda’ for all other adjectives. In my use of Luganda terms and phrases, I have attempted to use the standard orthography. While I have attempted to check with native speakers, I apologise to any speakers of Luganda for any errors or misspellings.

Economy

The diversity of the villages is important, however in terms of economic activity there is far greater similarity and, for most, daily economic life revolves around their farms. There are a small number of migrant workers working as cattle herders, but the focus of my research is almost entirely on the resident farmers who mix crop growing with livestock-rearing. As Chapter 2 offers a more extended discussion of livelihoods, I provide here only a very brief introduction.

From first light people spend the morning in the fields, the right-angled, flat-bladed hoe almost the only tool needed. Planting coincides with the first rains of the season, in March and September; the key being to grow *mmere* (‘food’ – primarily cassava, maize, sweet potato) and *nva* (‘sauce’ – beans and groundnuts), and hope there will be some surplus to sell for school fees or medical bills, or to invest in livestock – cattle, goats, chickens, or pigs. The lack of crop variety grown on the majority of farms is quite striking, with only a few smallholders venturing much beyond the staples. Every farm does however have its *lusuku* (banana plantation) for growing *matooke*, the key food in Buganda (Hanson 1997). And most have one or two avocado, papaya, and mango trees. In addition, many households have at least a few coffee trees (some have very many) from which they can earn some money from the

local traders who travel around collecting harvested beans.

I moved to Nabikakala in mid-January 2013, just catching the last week or so of fresh maize – so tasty roasted over an open fire for an afternoon snack. This season was considered reasonably productive, however the two full agricultural seasons I was resident in Nabikakala were very poor as a result of harsh sun and little rainfall. I left the field to return to Edinburgh the following February with people struggling to find money to buy food, and still about five months away from the next harvest.

Buganda

This is not an ethnography of the Baganda as such. It is an ethnography *in* Buganda. Despite the large minorities of inhabitants from other ethnic backgrounds, Nabikakala and Bukula remain clearly Ganda. They are situated in the heart of Buddu, one of the traditional counties (*masaza*, sing. *saza*) which make up the kingdom, and many residents who are not Baganda as a result of their patriline nevertheless self-identify as Baganda. Even for those who do not, by virtue of their residence, the kingdom affects their lives to at least some extent.

The abolition of the kingship in 1966 by the then president, Milton Obote, served to intensify Ganda nationalism and the Baganda campaigned for the reinstatement of their *kabaka* (King) until finally succeeding in 1993. While nominally the *kabaka* is a solely ‘cultural’ role, leaving ‘politics’ to the Ugandan government, in practice the division is a fine one, with the Buganda kingdom having set up its own parliament (Englebert 2002; Oloka-Onyango 2007). Many Baganda demonstrate a great pride for their kingdom and a clear fondness for the *kabaka*. This may partly stem from the kingdom’s position at the heart of the country, with the capital, Kampala, also having been the seat of the *kabaka*. Buganda enjoyed a relatively privileged position during British colonial rule, as the colonists looked favourably on the Ganda political structure and administrative apparatus (Roberts 1962: 436; Twaddle 1974; Wrigley 1996: 5). The strength of feeling towards their kingdom is evident in the fervour with which any public appearance of the *kabaka* is greeted. In addition, in the front room

of most Ganda houses one can find either a poster or calendar of the *kabaka* or the clans of the kingdom, or a plaque pertaining to the clan of the head of the household. Pierre Englebert has shown how the kingdom has promoted itself as ‘an idea’, with a flag, anthem, and national events, as well as an ideology based on moral regeneration and conservatism (2002: 350–351; see also Karlström 2004).

Since the 1993 restoration, tensions between the Ugandan government and Buganda have simmered, at times erupting into more violent unrest, such as in September 2009 when the *kabaka* was prevented from visiting a part of the kingdom considering secession (Baral and Brisset-Foucault 2009). A number of authors including Englebert (2002), Tom Goodfellow and Stefan Lindemann (2013), and J. Oloka-Onyango (2007) have attempted to unpick the relationship between the two.

Despite being a fertile ground for ethnographic research, there have been surprisingly few in-depth ethnographies of rural Buganda, a point also made by Michael Twaddle (1974: 311). Exceptions include Audrey Richards (1966), Robertson (1986), and Martin Southwold (1965, 1971). The classic early accounts of the kingdom come from John Roscoe (1965 [1911]) and Apolo Kagwa (1934).

RESEARCHING WELLBEING

I debated both prior to and throughout my fieldwork the best approach to conducting and presenting my research. In the months leading up to my departure for Uganda, whenever I explained my project to people their response was commonly along the lines of, ‘well, happiness depends on the person, doesn’t it?’ To an extent, this is correct – aspirations, desires, and ideas of success and achievement are personal. But they are also social (Jackson 2011; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a: 7). People’s ideas of what entails a good life do not exist in a vacuum and are a product of the interaction of the individual with their socio-cultural context as well as their personal history. It became evident to me that my research methods had to reflect this.

I recognised that studying wellbeing as an abstract concept would prove difficult.

As Rapport states, “‘Well-being’ in the abstract is far harder to elucidate than well-being in particular times and places, situations and milieux, exchanges, interactions and relationships’ (2008: 108) – a reminder, perhaps, of the benefit of looking at what wellbeing *does*. Effectively studying wellbeing ethnographically benefits from a way to anchor it. A number of scholars have approached the problem of studying subjectivity through the exploration of experience (Biehl, Good, and Kleinman 2007). Examples include research on pain (Charmaz 1999; Kleinman et al. 1992), love (Lewinson 2006; Thomas and Cole 2009), imagination (Weiss 2008), and efforts to deal with illness and disease (Le Marcis 2004). In a similar vein, other scholars have anchored their analysis on particular examples or situations. For example, we might look at healing practices and what these can tell us about both suffering and attempts to ameliorate one’s condition, such as Christine Obbo’s (1996) and John Ssekamwa’s (1967) accounts of consulting healers in Buganda, the latter in particular drawing on his own experiences of these visits. Hanne Mogensen (2002) explores the ways in which the Jop’Adhola in eastern Uganda engage with *juok*, which she describes as ‘all of: God, the devil, evil spirits, wind and power, good or bad in excess, depending on the situation and combined in different ways’ (p. 425), in order to externalise suffering and consequently act upon it (see also Lienhardt 1961). Jackson (2005) advocates an ‘anthropology of events’ in which a specific event should be dissected for its ‘significance’, or its social and ethical ramifications. An example that fits Jackson’s suggestion is Smith’s (2006) study of the appearance of the spirit-python discussed above.

Following these various influences situates my work in a broadly phenomenological tradition of ways to study topics including lived experience, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, suffering, and morality. Robert Desjarlais and Jason Throop define phenomenology as ‘the study of phenomena as they appear to the consciousnesses of an individual or a group of people; the study of things as they appear in our lived experiences’ (2011: 88). As such, a phenomenological perspective avoids a firm distinction between objectivity and subjectivity (2011: 89). My approach

to this research reflects Desjarlais and Throop's definition.

The particular

What the examples above have in common is a focus on the particular. I took especial inspiration from what Lila Abu-Lughod terms 'ethnographies of the particular' (1991, 2000) or ethnographic research which focuses in depth on the stories of a small number of individuals (e.g. Caplan 1997; Crapanzano 1985; Wachowich et al. 2001). The opportunity such studies provide to explore particular lives and to show life in all its incoherence and messiness greatly appealed to me. It seems to make the ethnography so much more 'real'. This closely relates to what Robert LeVine (1982) has called person-centred ethnography, which, Douglas Hollan says, 'offers a powerful way of grounding social, psychological, and even biological theories of human behavior in the lived experience of real people' (2001: 62). Hollan used such an approach in his contribution to *Pursuits of Happiness*, advocating the value of 'self-scapes' for wellbeing research (2009).

While some scholars have elected to focus on detailed life histories (Lambek (2015), for example, offers an interesting study of happiness through one elderly Swiss farmer), I felt that a focus *solely* on individuals entailed a danger of critics contending that my research simply presented how wellbeing is conceived by these few individuals. In order to say something more general about the pursuit of wellbeing in my field site I therefore sought an approach that incorporated the benefits of a focus on individuals but nevertheless maintained a greater breadth. Person-centred ethnography like this 'enables one to investigate, in a fine-grained way, the complex interrelationships between individuals and their social, material, and symbolic contexts' (Levy and Hollan 2015: 313). Therefore, while person-centred ethnography focuses on individuals, it is nevertheless concerned with the wider context. Living in Nabikakala and participating in everyday life allowed me to get a sense of the broader social landscape to help provide this context.

Biography and narrative

My approach is not quite a full ‘life-history’ approach but is biographical and narrative in that it draws on the past, present, and future of my key informants. Biography, narrative, or life stories are important for this study for two closely related reasons. Firstly, there are methodological benefits, and a number of other anthropologists have likewise made extensive use of biographical stories to examine issues relating to the good life (Finnström 2008; Jackson 2011; Mathews 1996). Jackson, in particular, uses vignettes or mini-biographies from people’s lives to explore effectively wellbeing among the Kuranko in Sierra Leone. Secondly, it seems that the process of narrating a life is an integral part of the process of living, and therefore of living well.

Approaching wellbeing through narrative offers a way of studying it by grounding it in particular lives. Narratives, as Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps say, can ‘illuminate life as we know it by raising challenging questions and exploring them from multiple angles’ (1996: 23). I see the pursuit of a good life as being fundamentally incoherent as people try things out, somewhat unsure of the most effective course of action to achieve wellbeing. The path one’s life takes is not a single, clearly defined track, but is rather a complex mix of routes. Narrative allows us to explore this. In addition, it challenges the distinction between objective and subjective research and description and thus allows us to more accurately portray human experience (Reck 1983: 8).

However, narrative research involves a creation of coherence from relative incoherence, and it does so with at least two steps – firstly as our interlocutors tell us their stories, and then again as we inscribe these in our research. As such, we must recognise that it is not that we *are* the stories we tell (Jackson 2002: 18) or that narratives offer ‘truth’ or ‘facts’ (Linde 1993: 16). They are not simply windows onto reality. Still, this creation of coherence reflects a similar process in the lives of our interlocutors. The title of Charlotte Linde’s book, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (1993), alludes to this process and, as Paul Ricoeur argues, the unity to our lives, and to our selves, is not substantial but narrative (1991: 33). Jackson puts it

somewhat more bleakly, saying, 'In making and telling stories we rework reality in order to make it bearable' (2002: 16). He argues that people everywhere need to believe their being is implicated in a wider 'Being', and that storytelling is a way of reconstituting events to give a sense of agency in disempowering circumstances (2002: 12–13; see also Linde 1993: 6). As Johan Brännmark suggests, this semblance of coherence to our lives has methodological implications because this is what allows us to talk about lives as wholes being happy lives (2003: 332). He likens life to a rope with endless individual threads entwined together to create a meaningful whole (p. 334), or as a collection of short stories with no overall narrative necessarily tying these together (p. 332).

This creation of coherence and the process of narrating our lives appears to be an important factor in personal wellbeing (Linde 1993; McAdams 2005; Pennebaker and Seagal 1999). This is evident by the fact that much psychotherapy involves helping people to redevelop a coherent sense of their self, for example through integrating a traumatic experience into the patient's wider understanding of their life as a whole (Lempert 1994; McAdams 1993: 31–33). We could see this, in Brännmark's terms, as weaving a wayward thread into our rope.

Part of the problem of seeing life as a whole in this way is that it retains a primacy of the individual. Rather than being solely about individuals, stories are always social; they are always collaborative and dialogic (Jackson 2002: 22; see also Ochs and Capps 1996: 31–2). We might then see the threads of stories rather as a meshwork than as a rope, much in the way Tim Ingold talks about lines (2007). However, instead of being a problem for wellbeing research, this is precisely why narrative is valuable, allowing us to study social life through the socially embedded stories of individual lives.

The philosopher Galen Strawson (2004) raises a further critique of the importance of narrative, arguing against there being a universal predisposition for individuals to see their lives as a narrative or that it is necessarily good to do so. He draws a distinction between diachronic and episodic self-experience, the former indicating a conception of oneself continuing through time while the latter does not.

Kavedžija (2015) draws on this work, preferring the terms narrative and immediate orientations, and argues that rather than these orientations defining personalities, any individual can have both, and that both tendencies have positive and negative effects on wellbeing. Bloch (2011), on the other hand, agrees with Strawson that there are two kinds of people, diachronic and episodic, but contends that both have a narrative self. The difference, he argues, is that diachronics ‘have a deep feeling of having a meaningful autobiography’ and that they engage in the creation of a ‘meta-representational diachronic narrative self’ (2011: n.p.). In any case, whether a person is consciously aware of their life as a narrative, lives nevertheless still have stories (Strawson 2004: 440) and these remain methodologically useful.

Researching wellbeing in Buganda

Drawing on these influences, I therefore opted to organise my thesis around a number of carefully selected individuals. Each of five chapters uses one of these people as a central focus around whom to discuss a theme which affects people in the villages more widely and which, I believe, are near-universal concerns in people’s attempts to live well. These key themes emerged through my wider research in the villages and it was only post-fieldwork that I matched individuals with the themes I felt their situations were best placed to explore. This does not mean, however, that these individuals’ pursuits of wellbeing are characterised solely by the theme discussed in ‘their’ chapter, nor that the themes could only be studied through these people. As such, all five individuals appear throughout the thesis and I draw further on ethnographic material from many other people in the villages. As this means that these key individuals appear before being fully introduced in their own chapters, I have provided a ‘*dramatis personae*’ section immediately following this introduction which offers some details about the main characters in the thesis.

From early on in my fieldwork I began considering candidates for these key informants, but it was only in the second half of my time in the villages that I narrowed these down to the five I selected. It was important that the individuals selected were

ones I knew quite well and who I believed felt that they could confide in me. I also sought to choose a diverse range of people that to some extent reflected the diversity of the villages. I wanted a range of ages, different religious backgrounds, Baganda and non-Baganda, male and female, those with different numbers of children, long and shorter-term residents, and those with and without extensive local kinship networks (Table 0-2). I came to see this diversity as a major strength in my project as it allowed me to draw more general conclusions from the comparisons between these individuals.

	Madina	Shaban	Kaytesi	Mpagi	Kyango
Age (in early 2012)	~ 65	24	37	32	68
Religious background	Muslim	Muslim	Jehovah's Witness	Protestant	Catholic / Traditional
Ethnic background	Congo	Muganda / Muynankole	Munyarwanda	Muganda	Muganda
Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male	Male
Children	7	2	7	5	8
Time in area	Since age 16-17	Since birth	Since 1990	Since 2008	Since birth
Local kinship network	Restricted	Extensive	Restricted	Extensive	Moderate

Table 0-2: Diversity of key informants

I have chosen not to anonymise those present in my thesis. This was both an ethical decision as well as a practical one. Ensuring anonymity would have been difficult, firstly due to the ease with which my field site could be identified from my prior involvement with Codewe. In addition, the nature of the presentation of my research, with the detailed focus on individuals, would have rendered them easily identifiable in the context of the village. Furthermore, I would feel uneasy with anonymising my informants, as to my mind it serves almost to dehumanise them. In 'Ire in Ireland', Nancy Scheper-Hughes describes her disinclination for anonymising as it leaves us 'too free with our pens' and 'unmindful' (2000: 128–129). Recognising that Scheper-Hughes faced ethical challenges about her own research in Ireland, this

is nevertheless a sentiment I agree with. I feel that not anonymising has ensured I remain more mindful throughout the writing process of the potential implications of what I write and this has allowed me to write a more 'real' and sensitive ethnography.

Research assistance

I worked with two assistants during my fieldwork and I owe a debt of gratitude to both. On my first day in Nabikakala, I asked Kobusingye if she knew of anyone who would be suitable to assist me, and the next morning she sent word to David Mpagi in Bukula to come to visit. Mpagi was the head teacher in a primary school in Lugalama but had a number of weeks free before the new academic year was to start. His English was good and he was immediately receptive to working with me. A couple of days later, we first set out together and spent the next few weeks visiting almost every household in Nabikakala and Bukula, introducing me and my work and taking some demographic details. This allowed me to get to know the villages in the company of a well-respected member of the community.

When Mpagi returned to school a few weeks later, his availability was intermittent and so I spent a lot more time visiting people on my own, and only working with Mpagi when he was free. In time, I felt I would benefit from more regular assistance in order to discuss with people in more depth about their motivations and aims and was lucky to get to know Moses, a relative of Mpagi who lived in Bukula with his grandfather, and who had been very sick in my first few months. From mid-way through my fieldwork, I worked with Moses five or six afternoons a week until I returned to Scotland. Mpagi remained one of my closest friends throughout my time in Uganda and became one of the key informants for this thesis. Moses has a more subtle presence in the thesis but taught me a huge amount from day to day and did his best to keep me right with social etiquette. I probably learned more from him than from any other individual.



Figure 0-3: Moses, and the characteristic landscape of the region

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

In Chapter 1, I introduce the concept of *embeera ennungi* (roughly translatable as a ‘good life’ or ‘good situation’) as a key desire for people in the villages and I explore what this entails and its relationship to other key concepts, such as *bugagga* (wealth) and *ssanyu* (happiness). I argue that *embeera ennungi* has instrumental value in terms of better enabling people to pursue the kinds of lives they desire as well as intrinsic value from the status it brings.

The following five chapters each then focus on one key theme and one individual, with a trajectory broadly from more material to more transcendental concerns. Chapter 2 looks at making a living. In doing so, it provides some further context on economic life in the villages. I argue that being able to secure a livelihood is a necessary precursor to any further attempts to live well. Chapter 3 then goes on to explore aspiration and the importance of hope. I discuss how aspirations are shaped and I contend that these must be seen to be pursuable or achievable. In Chapter 4, I consider gratification deferral, or the extent to which villagers can and do choose to defer rewards. Then, in Chapter 5, I examine the importance of *mikisa* (‘luck’ or ‘blessings’), which are

necessary to achieving or attaining anything good. I look at the question of how to get *mikisa* and show how this question is a moral one. In the final biographical chapter, Chapter 6, I discuss themes of connectedness and continuity, demonstrating how these are important in allowing people to feel their lives have some meaning or that they are part of something greater than themselves.

Chapter 7 mirrors Chapter 1 by moving away from the in-depth focus on individuals and attempts to speak more broadly about the pursuit of a good life in the villages. In doing so, it draws together a number of themes in evidence throughout the thesis, culminating in an argument that understanding and effectively pursuing wellbeing benefits from a recognition that wellbeing is relational and should balance individual and social concerns.

In the conclusion, I offer some final insights into how my work relates to wider wellbeing themes. I do so primarily by returning to the questions I raised above, following Joseph's comment about helping people live a happier life.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- Ziwa family** My family in Uganda. Throughout my fieldwork, I lived with Mr. and Mrs. Ziwa in Nabikakala, and stayed with a number of their sons when spending time in Kampala. The NGO, the Global Coalition for Development and Welfare (Codewe), was largely run by members of this family. In this thesis, I refer to him as (Muzeeyi) Ziwa and her as Kobusingye.
- Moses** My long-term assistant in the field. A Muslim man in his early twenties, with a father from Ankole and a mother from Buganda. Moses' parents lived in Kampala and Moses was largely raised by his paternal grandparents, with whom he still resides. He completed four years of secondary school and now teaches each morning in Kaswabuli Primary school at Nalwewuba.
- Madina** Madina comes from a Muslim family. Her father was originally from
Chapter 2 Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) and her mother came from Rwanda. Madina, however, was born and raised in Ankole and then Buganda. She nevertheless considers herself to be a Muzayire. She lives alone with a grandson, following the death of her husband a few years prior to my fieldwork, while a daughter lives with her family in a hut nearby. Now elderly, Madina frequently complains of aches and pains, but she continues to work hard in her fields and in her coffee plantation.
- Shaban** Moses' brother, elder by two years. Shaban holds a long-term lease on
Chapter 3 a small patch of land in Lugalama on which he has constructed a small two-roomed house. A father of two young children, he is nevertheless unmarried and lives alone. After working in Kampala and northern Uganda for a couple of years, he returned to the villages, where he received training as a builder, a vocation that now provides the

majority of his income.

Kaytesi
Chapter 4 Kaytesi, a devout Jehovah's Witness, moved to Bukula from Rwanda with her husband, Kaloli, 22 years before I arrived for fieldwork. She is Kaloli's second wife, the first of whom lives in a house a few hundred metres away. Kaytesi is in her late thirties, has seven children with Kaloli ranging in age from 1-15, and spends her days in her fields and attending to her few cattle and other livestock.

Mpagi
Chapter 5 Mpagi (pronounced M-pa-ji) acted as my assistant in my initial weeks in the villages, until his commitments as head teacher at Kaswabuli Primary School made finding time together difficult. A Muganda in his early thirties, he arrived in Bukula with his wife and two sons from the town of Entebbe, near Kampala, five or six years prior to my arrival. They had a baby girl during my fieldwork. The family attends the small Protestant church in Nalwewuba.

Kyango
Chapter 6 Kyango (Chang-go) is an elderly Muganda living alone in Bukula, and formerly the village chairman. He identifies loosely as a Catholic, but towards the end of my fieldwork left his work as a carpenter at the behest of his ancestor spirits to set himself up full-time as a *musawo muganda* (local healer). Kyango had a number of children with his former wife, the eldest around 15, all of whom live elsewhere.

Chapter 1 - *EMBEERA ENNUNGI* (A GOOD SITUATION)

The important thing is to have embeera ennungi
(Shaban, November 2013)

Most adults in the villages, when I asked about how they would like their life to be in the future, initially replied by saying something like, ‘to get *embeera ennungi*’. The term *embeera* features prominently in evaluative conversations about life, and it is a versatile term that can refer to living conditions as well as more existential considerations. In this chapter, I offer a somewhat simplified overview of this complex concept in order to provide the reader with a point of reference for the rest of the thesis.

WHY EMBEERA ENNUNGI?

I spent my first few weeks in Uganda living in Kampala and I took the opportunity to spend some time with bilingual Luganda-English speakers. Taking inspiration from those wellbeing studies that have focused on the examination of local terms and concepts, I was keen to conduct an initial exploration into the various Luganda terms related to my research interests. In these sessions with individuals or groups I gave them various English terms, such as ‘happiness’, and asked for as many translations as possible into Luganda, upon which we would then discuss the nuances of these different terms. I repeated the process in reverse with the Luganda terms that arose. This approach served to increase my knowledge of Luganda vocabulary most specifically relevant to my interests, but more importantly introduced some of the key concepts I would go on to investigate in the villages. While I discuss here some of the semantic nuances of these terms (and do likewise with a number of other terms later in the thesis), I do so as a way into the topics rather than with a view to pinning down definitions.

It was during these sessions that I first learned the term *embeera ennungi*, although it was only after having spent some time in the villages that I fully appreciated

its importance. *Embeera ennungi* was one of two translations I was given for ‘good life’, the other being *obulamu obulungi*. The latter I was aware of as a term used by other scholars to speak about ‘the good life’ in Buganda (Hoelsing 2011; Wallman 1996). Despite many conversations throughout my fieldwork, the majority of my interlocutors found it difficult to explain how the two concepts differ and, consequently, the nuances between them proved difficult to establish. In each case the second word derives from the stem *-lungi*, meaning ‘good’, ‘well’, or a variety of other positive adjectives. A person’s *obulamu* or *embeera*, therefore, can be rated as either bad or good. In everyday life, the two are used largely interchangeably and both are concerned with the evaluation of life, exemplified by the common simple greetings ‘*embeera?*’ or ‘*obulamu?*’ – basically, ‘how is life?’ As such, I do not wish to overstate the difference between *obulamu* and *embeera*, however I want to explain why, in this thesis, I find *embeera ennungi* a particularly useful term to think with.

While the second words of these terms are relatively straightforward, the first words are a little more difficult to parse. *Obulamu* is translated in two Luganda-English dictionaries as: ‘life; health; well-being’ (Bagunywa et al. 2009: 14; Snoxall 1967: 29) and, from paying close attention to the contexts in which I found it used, seems to refer more to wellbeing in terms of health, or to life in physiological terms. *Embeera*, on the other hand, was often translated to me as ‘situation’ (the English term I prefer in this thesis), but also as ‘life’, and is perhaps a concept more evaluative of one’s life as a whole – ‘life’ in a wider sense than *obulamu*. The word derives from the verb ‘to be’, *okubeera*, and could therefore perhaps be described as one’s ‘being’, a translation reflected in the dictionary, where it is defined as: ‘state, condition, being’ (Snoxall 1967: 202).

My confusion around the difference between these two terms can be demonstrated by a phrase that perplexed me for months. During my time in Uganda, there was a major health campaign run by the Uganda Health Marketing Group (UHMG) under the slogan ‘Good life starts with good health’. This was translated into Luganda as ‘*Obulamu obulungi butandika ne’mbeera ennungi*’. As far as I was

concerned, translating this slogan directly (though somewhat clumsily) into English would result in something like ‘A good life (or good health) starts with a good situation’. It implies that the former, *obulamu*, can only be good if you ensure that your *embeera* is good, and therefore that *embeera* is something you can, or should be able to, do something about improving. *Obulamu* simply follows from this – something along the lines of if you look after yourself and live right, if the right conditions are met, then a ‘good life’ will be achievable.

Despite the difficulty in articulating the nuances between the two concepts, having paid close attention to how each word is used, I believe *embeera* does encompass something beyond *obulamu*. Furthermore, it is something you can potentially have more control over than your *obulamu*, and consequently is something that you can work on improving. Finally, as suggested above, *embeera ennungi* is what people purport to aspire to, and is therefore of great interest.

WHAT IS EMBEERA ENNUNGI?

I have noted the analytical importance of *embeera ennungi* because it is what people in Nabikakala and Bukula say they want. But what do they mean when they talk about this? How do they explain it? And why do they want it? Over numerous discussions, my interlocutors highlighted certain things key to *embeera ennungi*, including a well-constructed dwelling, somewhere to get a good sleep, land for cultivation, and both sufficient and diverse food. Many, too, cited good health as being important. If your health is not good then it is very difficult to feel that *embeera* is good. You are uncertain whether or when you will recover. You may be unable to cultivate your garden effectively, to cook and care for your children, or to engage in paid labour. Nonetheless, some argued that health is not crucial for *embeera ennungi*, since, if you have this then you can afford to pay for good healthcare. Ultimately, *embeera ennungi* does not have one coherent meaning but rather means slightly different things to different people in the villages. Nonetheless, two things came up in almost every

discussion I had about the concept – money and people.

Money and wealth

To have embeera ennungi you need money
(Matovu, elderly resident of Bukula, July 2013)

The most commonly cited influence on *embeera* is money. While many desire material wealth, for others it is simply a case of having ‘enough’. Money itself does not equate to *embeera ennungi*, but having more money does help raise your level of *embeera*. Four main categories of benefit emerged from my discussions in the villages regarding the value of money.

Firstly, money allows you to satisfy basic needs such as shelter, food, school fees, and healthcare. As Namubiru, an elderly woman in Bukula, told me, ‘*Embeera ennungi* needs money. If someone is sick with malaria, you need money to pay for the healthcare. Money is required to get the things you need in life’.

Money also provides a cushion against future deficits or problems, a factor that gives life greater security and helps reduce worry. For example, following the two poor agricultural seasons during my time in Nabikakala, the Ziwa family were able to cope with the food shortages more effectively than most thanks to the money earned by their sons and daughters working in Kampala. It meant that, while disappointed that their graft in the fields did not bring satisfactory rewards, they did not face the constant worries other households experienced because of this. Another frequent difficulty people face is meeting unforeseen medical bills and, while it is common to borrow from friends and family in order to do so, most would prefer to be able to deal with problems themselves and avoid the potential difficulties borrowing money may bring.

Furthermore, money enables you to satisfy not only your needs but also to attain those things you want. As Mpagi said:

Embeera ennungi is like this... when your family ask for a crate of soda, and they have gone two weeks without having any, then you can ask someone to bring you some from town. Next week the children come and ask to go to Masaka [the nearby town], so I get my car and we go. *Embeera ennungi* is when you get everything you want in time.

Clearly, it is never possible for people to meet all their desires; however, the idea that attaining *embeera ennungi* would allow you to get everything you want arose commonly. Importantly, it is not just the getting of these things that is important but it is also the *ability* to do so – an ability that brings an element of comfort to your life.

Finally, having money relates to social status, both on its own and in its function of facilitating material wealth. Money and material wealth bring friendship and respect. Nantongo and Munyalusoka, two elderly residents of Bukula, both explained to me that if you do not have money then you do not have friends – a sentiment expressed by many. Similarly, a middle-aged Munyankole woman known by the somewhat amusing nickname Njagala Muceere ('I want rice') explained that while *embeera ennungi* is primarily about people, you need money in order to attract people to you. When I pointed out that people do visit just to chat, not expecting anything else from her, she agreed but said that if you have nothing to give them when they visit then you feel very bad.

Wealth

Before moving on, I want to discuss briefly the concept of wealth and its relation to *embeera*. Wealth (*bugagga*) will most likely, but not necessarily, bring you *embeera ennungi*. My interlocutors generally described *bugagga* in material terms, as having a few of the following: money, a nice house, livestock, land, or vehicles (particularly a car). Importantly, it is a relative concept rather than an absolute. Consider the following quote from Madina:

Bugagga... what it means... is to make more money than others. In our day, someone buying a bike was like someone today buying a car: 'Eh, that person is rich, he has got a new bike'. Do you see? If he gets a new bike, and keeps adding, then he will be able to get a motorcar: 'You know that man who had a new bike, he has really become rich now, now he has got a car'.

Bugagga means being materially or financially better off than most others in the area. Madina's second sentence demonstrates that ideas of what is required to be wealthy are fluid and depend on comparison with what is reasonably expectable to achieve. For example, about half of male householders in the village own a motorbike. However,

owning a motorbike does not make you a *mugagga* (wealthy person) because most consider it a necessity for providing for the family and also because it is so common to have one. Similarly, having a few goats or cattle does not make you rich – it is a situation in which most households can expect to be. When Madina was younger only the rich could afford a bicycle, whereas now almost every household has one.

Other accounts of Uganda describe people as being a key aspect of wealth (Meinert 2009: 110; Whyte 1997: 54), or prosperity (Kilbride 1979: 234), similar to the ‘wealth in people’ literature from sub-Saharan Africa (Guyer and Belinga 1995; Kopytoff and Miers 1979; Vansina 1990). This literature has shown how material wealth is needed to acquire wealth in people, reflecting Njagala Muceere’s words above. However, there was some debate in my field site around whether people are considered to constitute *bugagga*. Munyalusoka, a man originally from Rwanda but who insisted he was now a Muganda, told me the proverb, *Obugagga bw’omuntu abantu* (The wealth of a person is in people), and explained that ‘if people love you then you are a *mugagga*’. Others, however, were quite adamant that *bugagga* can only come through the material goods noted above. I would argue that in the context of my fieldwork people are more commonly seen as *potential* wealth. People themselves are not considered *bugagga*, but having many children increases the chances of becoming wealthy, as they help provide for you in old age, and female offspring are particularly valued as a source of material wealth for families if they marry well (Kiyimba 2005). Regardless of whether people are considered to constitute ‘wealth’, they are nonetheless seen as an important aspect of *embeera ennungi*.

People

Despite the importance of money, almost no one told me that *embeera ennungi* was solely about this. People are another major determinant of *embeera*, both negatively and positively. When I asked Kalaveri, an elderly man originally from Burundi, to explain *embeera ennungi* he said simply, ‘to be with people’, and both Namubiru and Matovu went on to express the importance of people for your *embeera*. This is true on

a number of levels. Villagers, like people everywhere, take great pleasure in each other's company. Beyond this, other people have an instrumental value in allowing you to live well, helping to overcome difficulties, and providing a level of security to life. The family and the clan is crucial to this, and the clan system has traditionally been at the heart of the Ganda social support structure (Nsimbi 1964: 27), although even in 1964 Nsimbi recognised that the importance of the clan structure was decreasing. Outside of their kin, people most carefully foster relationships with those who may be able to help them (see also Scherz 2014). An elderly Muganda man in Lugalama, Falasiko, explained to me that people only want friends if they think they can benefit from them, typically from their wealth, but also potentially their knowledge or in some other way. This reflects the viewpoints of Nantongo, Munyalusoka, and Njagala Muceere regarding the importance of material wealth in developing relationships. Finally, familial relationships are essential to being seen as a complete person – women and men without a partner face continual questions about when they will find one, and an adult without children faces not only social disapproval in life, but also risks being forgotten after death with no one to continue their lineage.

THE WIDER MEANING OF *EMBEERA ENNUNGI*

I want now to go beyond the specifics of what constitutes *embeera ennungi* to outline what I see as the concept's two most important functions. These more abstract meanings of *embeera ennungi* are, doubtless, more difficult to express in everyday conversation, however from the ways in which people in the villages described it to me I was able to draw some more general conclusions.

Enablement

I noted earlier that *embeera* is something over which you should ideally have some control – you ought to be able to work to improve the conditions of your life. However, there is something of a paradox here, as when *embeera* is poor any attempts to improve it are made more difficult. Better *embeera* improves your ability to pursue the kind of

life you desire. I had many conversations about this with Moses who frequently lamented the difficulty of beginning any project without the initial money or land to do so. Many in the village are therefore caught in a catch-22 situation in which achieving *embeera ennungi* is often reliant on having control over life, but enhancing that control requires first having *embeera ennungi*.

In essence, *embeera ennungi* is more than anything about enablement. When a family has sufficient money, good health, and a strong social support network, the uncertainty resulting from reliance on auspicious weather, obtaining markets for produce, or jealous neighbours can be largely counteracted. This, in turn, allows people to reduce their worries, helping them to feel more secure, comfortable, and happy. In this respect it is similar to Finnström's account of *piny maber* (good surroundings) among the Acholi in northern Uganda, an ideal allowing Acholi 'to live under enduring conditions, in which future wealth can be imagined, even planned for' (2008: 10–11). Likewise, achieving *embeera ennungi* is about attaining a situation that enables you to pursue the kind of life you desire. It is for these reasons that *embeera ennungi* is such an important concept in this research and for the people with whom I lived. They see limits in their current lives, which prevent them from being able to live as they would like, and seek *embeera ennungi* because they believe this will afford them the conditions to do so. *Embeera ennungi* is simultaneously the embodiment of a good life and also what enables you to live well; it is both an end and a means.

Self-reliance

Omunaku kaama – yelandiza yekka

An orphan is [like] a yam; no one helps a yam to wrap itself
around a tree in order to grow
(Kizza 2010: 61)

Closely linked to the idea of *embeera ennungi* as enablement is the ideal of self-reliance, something evident in numerous proverbs, such as the one above. Self-reliance indicates a sense of self-determination, of having control over your own life, and not being at the mercy of the whims of others. For example, Veronika, a Musoga woman

living near me in Nabikakala, explained that for her to achieve *embeera ennungi* required two things – educating her children, and being able to work solely on her own land rather than having to seek additional wage labour on other people’s farms. It is important to her to be in control of her own means of production. Similarly, Mpagi complained about having to work on other people’s land when he initially moved to Bukula due to the immediate need of money, and of his frustration that this allowed him very little time to work on his own land. However, Mpagi’s later employment in the school suggests that a regular steady income is more desirable than relying solely on the products of his land. At first glance, this self-reliance may seem contradictory to the importance of people, but self-reliance is more significant at the household level than the individual and is understood in terms of being able to provide for oneself and one’s family – the people remain important.

Relativity

A further important factor is that *embeera ennungi*, like wealth, has a relative dimension rather than being purely absolute – people evaluate their *embeera* in relation to others. It is about being able to get the things you need or want, but goes beyond the satisfaction of basic needs. You may have everything you need to keep yourself alive, but not be able to say that your *embeera* is good. *Embeera ennungi* is about meeting the conditions you could reasonably expect to achieve, and this is largely judged with reference to the lives of others. These others may be other villagers, they may be kin living elsewhere, or they may be ancestors or descendants. An example could be the malaise felt by many people in their twenties and thirties in the UK currently struggling to get on the property ladder (Bone and O’Reilly 2010: 242–3). They have learned from their parents that the ability to own property is something they could reasonably expect to achieve. In Bukula, Mpagi felt a similar disquiet with regard to the thatching on his house, while many of his contemporaries had been able to roof their homes with iron sheeting. He felt bad not being at the same level as the other men in the village; he was not meeting the standard that is evidently attainable by men of his age in the

area.

The desire to be relatively better off than others is important in terms of your social standing. Mpagi explained to me that it is important for him to be able to give his children good food and to clothe them well. The children, of course, compare themselves with others and if they do not have good clothes they get annoyed, or if they do not get to eat meat at Christmas, for example, then they can just ‘sit at home as if their father has died’. There are therefore evident social pressures to maintain your status relative to others. These examples suggest that you may feel bad when you are relatively worse off than the people with whom you associate.

This relativity is crucial to understanding the pursuit of a good life in the village. Shaban says he wants to be relatively better off than most other people in the area. Achieving a good life is understood as one that is better than the typical. As people in the village have become more and more exposed to alternative lives, in the city and abroad, they see their lives as increasingly falling short of what can be expected for someone of their position (see also Thompson and Roper 1976). Visibility is important here. We compare ourselves with those we can see, and in a more connected world we can see more alternative ways of living and more alternative potential lives.

EMBEERA AND OTHER GOODS

We will see throughout this thesis that, even though *embeera ennungi* is almost universally expressed as an ideal in the villages, people’s actions do not always reflect a straightforward pursuit of this. Of course, this is hardly surprising and reflects Fischer’s recent work looking at the differences between stated and revealed preferences in Germany and Guatemala (2014), and is furthermore reminiscent of Malinowski’s warnings about inconsistencies between what people tell us and what they do (Kuper 2015: 15). As such, this thesis is not only about the pursuit of *embeera ennungi* but it is also about not pursuing it – the consumption of alcohol is perhaps the most obvious activity in apparent contravention of the pursuit of *embeera ennungi*.

Partly this is because effectively pursuing *embeera ennungi* is difficult for many residents of the villages, and when individuals see their or others' efforts coming to naught a disinclination to work hard for it may ensue. However, more important is the fact that other goods are also valued, such as, in the case of alcohol consumption for example, enjoying life in the present.

This is where the pursuit of a good life gets interesting. People do not know exactly what they want, they likely want many different things, and these things may be mutually incompatible. Numerous values guide how people live and evaluate their lives, such as the desire for respect, acceptance, power, control, security over one's life, health and longevity, and enjoyment. Not all of these necessarily require *embeera ennungi*, but achieving this typically enhances access to these goods.

A question implicitly underlying my research from the outset has concerned the association between happiness (*ssanyu*) and having a good life. I spoke at some length about this relationship with people in the villages and most maintained that achieving *embeera ennungi* brings happiness and that being happy with your life without *embeera ennungi* is difficult if not impossible. Earlier in the research process I had imagined, somewhat naively in retrospect, that most people in the village would pursue happiness. Over time, however, my thinking evolved into a conviction that it is *embeera ennungi* they seek, and happiness is seen as a consequence of its achievement. When I asked people why they seek *embeera ennungi*, the answer was sometimes 'ssanyu' but it did not appear that happiness itself was what they pursued. The link between happiness and a good life is not straightforward, however from the ways in which people talked about it, this link appeared more straightforward than was evident from people's actions.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the concept of *embeera ennungi* and its importance in how people in the villages talk about their lives. In reality, although the

achievement of *embeera ennungi* is an ideal most desire, the pursuit of a good life is not simply about this. The remainder of this thesis is an exploration of some of the questions and tensions involved in the attempt to live well.

Chapter 2 - MAKING A LIVING

Livelihood: 'A means of securing the necessities of life'
(‘Livelihood’ n.d. Oxford Dictionaries Online)

My introduction to Madina Nabawesi was one of my most memorable during my early days in the villages. Visiting her home with Mpagi a week or so after my arrival I remember a small old woman with a brilliant smile. We sat, as we would regularly come to do over the following year, on a woven mat in the shade of an avocado tree outside her house. She told us that the first child who had opened the front door that morning would receive a gift, as the day had brought a special visitor. Madina was immediately talkative and began telling me about her daily life... her coffee plantation... her declining health... the support of her daughter nearby... her disputes with someone wanting to take her land. She continued this commentary every time I visited, usually before I even had the time to ask her anything. Almost invariably however, the things Madina wanted to talk about seemed to be concerned with her ability to make a living.

As Henrik Vigh has recently pointed out in the *Hau* special issue on happiness and values, security is ‘a very first foundational step toward being well at all’ (2015: 100). While the context of Vigh’s work is quite different from my own (he looks at the desire for wellbeing among young men in Guinea-Bissau who join militia groups partly for the security they offer), the significance of security is similar. Creating and maintaining a viable livelihood is the fundamental basis that allows people in Nabikakala and Bukula the security to go on and pursue those things that they feel will make life better. In Maslowian terms, this chapter is concerned primarily with the ‘safety’ and ‘physiological’ levels of his hierarchy of needs, levels which provide a basis for the pursuit of higher-order needs (Maslow 1943). Livelihoods have an immediate and significant impact on one’s life, not only in terms of ensuring a person secures their basic needs, but also for the emotional implications of the success or failure of livelihood efforts. Livelihoods, especially sustainable livelihoods, have been

an important focus for much development research (Carney 1998; Chambers and Conway 1991; Ellis 2000; Scoones 1998).

In this chapter, with a focus on Madina, I examine how people in the villages pursue a livelihood. At this stage of her life, Madina no longer has dependent children and, following the death of her husband, is largely reliant on her own endeavour to survive, something made more difficult by her declining health. My aims in this chapter are, firstly, to offer a description of livelihoods strategies in the villages, thus providing some further context for the discussions that follow later in the thesis and, secondly, to consider some of the ways in which attempts to make a living relate to pursuits of a good life.

I begin by discussing the concept of *okubeerawo*, which, I argue, comes closest to incorporating the idea of a livelihood as defined above, although which goes beyond simply securing survival. I continue with an exploration of livelihood strategies – primarily subsistence farming and money-making – and discuss some of the factors that have the greatest impact on villagers’ ability to pursue a livelihood. These external influences often render livelihoods precarious and uncertain and can cause people to worry. The primary manner in which people have greater control over their livelihood efforts is through work. Work not only has obvious instrumental value in making a living, but it carries great social value too, and I explore this further by discussing how it relates to concepts of leisure. This leads to the importance of social support. Livelihoods are social endeavours – a fact that has negative impacts as well as the more positive effects of helping people to overcome problems.

MADINA

Madina was born and grew up in rural Ankole, the kingdom bordering Buganda to the south-west.² Her mother came from Rwanda while her father was originally from Zaire

² The Ankole kingdom was abolished, like Buganda, in 1966. However, unlike Buganda, it has not yet been officially restored.

(now Democratic Republic of Congo), and she refers to herself as a *Muzayire* despite having lived her whole life in Uganda. Both parents were Muslim, and she has followed in this religion. Madina was the first child of her father, and her mother had one other before passing away. Madina's father then had six further children with another woman. Like her siblings, Madina received no schooling due to a lack of money in the family.



Figure 2-1: Madina preparing matooke

When she was around 16 or 17 the family moved from Ankole to Lugalama and, shortly after, Madina married a Catholic man from a neighbouring district and moved to live with him. She said that her father was unhappy about this marriage because he did not like the behaviour or habits of Catholics, although she did not explain his reasons. From this marriage, Madina had two boys and two girls, but the relationship ended unhappily:

I was his only wife, but later he found himself another woman. He started abusing me, hitting me with sticks, looking at me as if I was rubbish. So I decided to leave him and I came back to my father's home in Lugalama.

The children remained with their father, but she was able to keep in touch with them. Only three are still alive and all now live in Kampala from where they come to visit her periodically.

A couple of years after returning to her father's home Madina married again, this time to a man in Bukula. Brahim was already married but his family had encouraged him to find a second wife after failing to have children with the first. Brahim had been a Muslim, but had converted to Christianity upon his first marriage. Madina's father made it a condition of his marriage to her that Brahim return to Islam, which he did.

Brahim told him that he did not have much to give [as *mutwalo* (bridewealth)], and my father told him that all he wanted was sugar. During this period, sugar was very expensive and Brahim struggled to get it. But my father insisted. In time, he managed to buy 5kg, but had to do it at night, as at this time people were not permitted to sell sugar.

In this marriage, Madina had another three children, two of whom now live in Kampala. The third, a daughter named Namuli, lives with her family in a house close to Madina's. It is quite unusual in Buganda for a man to move to live on his wife's land as Namuli's husband has, and it is considered quite demeaning for the man. There is an interesting parallel with Brahim who, before meeting Madina, moved to live on the land of his first wife. As Madina said, 'It was really her that married him, rather than him marrying her'. The verb she used for 'marry', *okuwasa*, is reserved for when men marry and means 'to cause someone to peel bananas'. For a woman it is *okufumbirwa* – 'to become the cook (for someone else)' (Hanson 1997: 15). By using the 'male' term Madina was subtly commenting on the moral propriety of traditional gender roles. When Madina married Brahim, he left this woman and moved back to his own land with Madina. They were married for around 23 years before Brahim passed away, three years before I arrived in the villages. Madina now lives with Bumali, the teenage son of Namuli.

She says she has never had a paid job, but has remained at home looking after children and farming. Despite her old age and declining health, I would still always find her at work cooking, weeding, or harvesting coffee berries. Brahim planted a

coffee plantation a number of years ago, relatively large by village standards, and the income Madina earns from selling these berries helps her to live.

I did not study, but I know how to farm. If you can grow beans you can get a little money from them and have something to eat. And with coffee trees, if you are able to care for them well then you can get some money for the things you need, like sugar, salt.

This final quote from Madina neatly encapsulates the question I want to address in this chapter – how do villagers make a livelihood? Madina’s words incorporate the intertwined livelihoods strategies of subsistence agriculture and the need to earn some money. Before going on to discuss these strategies in some greater depth, I will now consider how the concept of a livelihood is understood in the villages.

OKUBEERAWO (BEING THERE)

I often asked villagers about the overarching aim of all the work they do during the day. One elderly man in Bukula, Munyalusoka, replied that it is ‘*okuyimiriza obulamu bwo*’ (to make your life stand up). A more common response was ‘*okubeerawo*’ which, translated literally, would mean ‘to be there’. Translated thus, it would perhaps suggest ‘survival’; however, although the term does not appear in my Luganda-English dictionaries, the manner in which it was used suggests a concept beyond simply survival. I first heard the word during one of my term translation exercises with a bilingual neighbour in Kampala when I asked her to translate ‘wellbeing’. I then came across the word again a few months later during a conversation in Bukula with Ivan, a young Rwandan man recently returned to the village from some years in Kampala. When I asked him why he works, he told me in a mix of Luganda and English, that it is ‘*obulamu* [health/life]... wellbeing... *okubeerawo*... survival... to satisfy your life... to stay well’. Ivan’s answer incorporates the importance of survival, but also goes further to suggest that it implies that you are well. The idea of being *there* corresponding to being *well* is reflected in the standard response to the question ‘how are you?’ of ‘*gye ndi*’. This translates literally as ‘I am there’, but has the effect of

saying ‘I am fine/well’.

I had a slightly more detailed discussion about the meaning of *okubeerawo* with Kaytesa after she told me that ‘work is anything people do to allow them *okubeerawo*’. In a subsequent conversation, after asking her why she works, Kaytesa answered ‘*okumbeezawo*’, a causative form of *okubeerawo* that could be translated, awkwardly, as ‘to cause myself to be there’, or more idiomatically ‘to keep myself alive’. She went on to explain that *okubeerawo* is:

When you have living conditions that allow you to stay alive. To work... if you are digging to get something to eat, or herding to get some money to help you get things you need... The way I see it, the things we do are to help us to get something to eat, something to wear, and the other things you need, such as to look after your children.

I believe that the instances of people equating *okubeerawo* with wellbeing demonstrate that this is about something a little more than mere survival. Rather than just keeping yourself alive, *okubeerawo* implies keeping yourself well, or is perhaps about having an acceptable standard of living. *Okubeerawo* is the immediate aim of livelihood strategies and must come before attempts to achieve *embeera ennungi*. How do villagers in this context keep themselves ‘there’? In the following section, I go on to provide an overview of the ways in which villagers in Nabikakala and Bukula pursue a livelihood, starting with farming before turning to look at money-making.

LIVELIHOODS STRATEGIES

The majority of households in the villages, Madina included, pursue two main livelihood strategies – farming and money-making. Exceptions include those who do not have access to land for agriculture and earn their living solely through wage labour, such as those employed as herders or farm labourers, and others who work largely in exchange for food. For some, a further source of resources comes in remittances from kin in Kampala or, for a few, from abroad. Agriculture and money-making are complex, intertwined topics, and, rather than attempt a comprehensive documentation of livelihoods strategies, my aim here is to give enough context to be able to go on and

discuss some of the factors which impact on livelihood efforts and render them precarious and uncertain.

Farming

For Madina, like most in the village, farming is the primary source of subsistence. The ideal outcome of an agricultural season is to have sufficient food to eat and a surplus to sell. Madina grows standard seasonal crops such as maize, sweet potatoes, beans, and groundnuts and, as the land has been in the family for many years, she also has a mature *matooke* plantation and a number of productive avocado, jackfruit, and mango trees. In addition to their crops, most homesteads will keep some livestock – usually some chickens, and frequently goats, cattle or, for the non-Muslims, pigs. Some have quite large herds of cattle and may even employ herders to care for them. Madina keeps only chickens, partly due to the extra work involved in keeping other animals.

Farming effort is almost entirely confined within each household, or possibly two closely related ones, with very little cooperation between different households. However, within the household farming is communal and families usually work together on the same tasks. Because of their proximity and close relationship, Madina and Namuli frequently work together. Those who can afford it may employ supplementary labour at key periods in the agricultural cycle, though most rely solely on the labour of the household. Both men and women work in the gardens and there is little formal division of labour in this respect. This observation contradicts earlier accounts which suggest a much firmer division; Roscoe noted that ‘the garden with its produce was always the wife’s domain’ (1965 [1911]: 426) and Conrad Kottak, much later, said, ‘there seem to be few societies with plant based cultivation as a subsistence base in which men are freed so completely from agricultural tasks’ (1972: 358). Nonetheless, with women typically responsible for cooking and the majority of childcare they are less likely to engage in paid labour, and so in many cases remain responsible for the majority of farming on their own land. Madina explained the worry a woman can feel with the bulk of the responsibility for growing food:

Women wake up and know they have to go to dig. They know that if they do not then there is nothing for the children, and they worry that their husband becomes tired of buying food. Nothing is simple.

It is an uncertain existence. On one occasion, I visited Madina and found her and Namuli digging up cassava, hacking open corners of the tubers with a large knife, tasting them, and spitting most out in disgust. They tried plant after plant, but almost every piece they uprooted had rotted. Their hard work over the past months clearing the ground, planting off-cuts, and battling weeds, had yielded very little. When I asked why so much had rotted, Madina just looked downcast and said she did not know. Farming can be fickle and often the reasons for poor yields are not known. It may be the result of pests, bad quality seeds, overused or unfertile soil, or of witchcraft. The most obvious and most immediate external influence on agriculture is the weather, although at least in this case it is clear why crops have struggled, even if it is not always clear why the weather has been unfavourable.

Money-making

Subsisting purely on the products of farming is difficult and villagers need money to meet a number of other needs, such as healthcare, school fees, and basic essentials such as cooking oil, salt, sugar, tea, and soap. Where ideally people are able to grow enough of their staple crops to sell some surplus, during relatively unproductive growing seasons they may have to purchase foodstuffs to supplement the produce from their gardens.

To this end, many grow cash crops in addition to the staple crops. Coffee is the principal cash crop in the villages, but other crops grown specifically for sale included watermelons, bananas, passion fruit, rice, tomatoes, and peppers. In nearby villages some homesteads also grow *miraa*, or *khat*, a mild stimulant leaf, which is packaged in banana leaves and taken to Kampala, primarily for sale to the Somali community. Madina's supplementary income from the sale of coffee berries helps counter some of the uncertainty around the success of her food crops and thereby gives a greater security to her livelihood.

Very few villagers have regular, consistent paid work and the incomes of those who do are often variable and unpredictable. Families therefore supplement any money they make from selling surplus food and cash crops with income from a wide variety of other sources. Moses and I counted more than fifty ways people in the immediate area make money. The variety is remarkable, for example:

Food preparation: Nakitende, the wife of the Bukula village chairman, fries small chapatis at her home – the only place to buy any prepared food without going a couple of kilometres to Nalwewuba.

Selling: Maama John, a long-term resident of Bukula originally from Burundi, sells locally distilled *waragi* (alcohol) from 20-litre jerrycans. At almost all hours of the day, I would find one or two people outside her house seated on the slanting bench in the shade of a citrus tree that yielded sour, pip-filled oranges, drinking the colourless liquid from shot glasses or small bottles.

Trades: Just over the boundary between Bukula and Lugalama, Steven sits in a thatched hut repairing radios and other small electrical items, surrounded by hundreds of spare parts.

Crafts: Nakaferu, a Mukiga woman, makes beautiful reed mats after spending hours collecting the reeds in the swamp and processing them.

Extractive: Kasesere, an elderly Muganda whose deafness was a continual source of amusement in Nabikakala, engages in casual labour and receives trees in exchange. He fells these and burns the wood in a *kyokero* (earthen mound) to make charcoal.

Moses and I went on to discuss the gender aspects of working for money. As I noted earlier, due to their domestic chores, women's time and mobility is somewhat more curtailed than men. Many of the money-making activities undertaken by women are those they can do from home, such as crafts, keeping a small shop, cooking food, or charging mobile phones from a solar panel. That said, there are no firm restrictions on women going farther afield to make money. Some work in other people's gardens, teach in the local schools, or collect firewood. Men have a little more freedom with regard to sources of income, and indeed in Ganda society the man is typically expected to be the primary money-earner in a relationship (Gysels, Pool, and Nnalusiba 2002: 183). Many men in the villages were involved in charcoal making, which at times entailed their being away from home for days at a time. Others fished for mudfish in the swamp, worked as bicycle or motorbike mechanics, or operated a *boda-boda*

(motorbike taxi).

An expression of this relative dependence on the man's income came one day with Madina, after I had turned off my voice recorder. She explained that it is difficult for her to do everything herself and if she had a man then he could try to find money. She complains frequently that her grandson, Bumali, is lazy and does little to help, although she does at least have the assistance of Namuli close by. This is a reminder that subsistence is fundamentally a communal concern, a fact evident in my discussions with Kyango and Shaban who both live alone. Kyango told me, 'it is a lot of trouble to cook every day just for myself', and so he typically eats in the small restaurant at Nalwewuba on his way home from working in Kiti. Shaban, too, cooks rarely and commonly returns to one of his grandparents' homes to eat. A successful home benefits from having multiple people working, in order to combine a productive garden with a source of monetary income.

FACTORS INFLUENCING SUBSISTENCE

Numerous factors influence the success of livelihood strategies. These include the availability and quality of primary resources, such as seeds, fertile soil, and agricultural tools, and favourable weather conditions, as well as access to suitable land. Other factors include maintaining one's health, and access to markets. Historically, war has also disrupted livelihoods, with a number of older people in the villages able to remember soldiers coming and looting their produce and livestock, although the region has been at peace since 1986. Finally, social factors also play a large part. As the economy is dominated by and reliant upon agriculture, factors affecting this have a knock-on effect on the ability to make money. That many in the villages lack control over these factors at times renders their livelihoods insecure. People living in Nabikakala and Bukula are living an uncertain life in which making a living is heavily contingent on a variety of factors not always within their own control. I turn now to look at a number of those factors of most immediate concern in Madina's life.

The weather

A major external impact on livelihood efforts is the weather, something that has an immediate and direct impact on many areas of life including transport links and mobility, health, the water supply, and economic activities such as fishing. However, it is in the agricultural sphere, as the key productive enterprise, that the most immediate effects of weather conditions and climatic fluctuations are felt.

I have noted previously the two poor growing seasons during my time in Nabikakala. In June of 2013 I had to return briefly to Scotland. When I left the village, people were worried that the rainy season had apparently stopped early and they were concerned that if the rains did not resume then their harvests would be poor. Upon my return a month later people were complaining about the poor yields. The disappointing season increased the importance of the following one at the end of the year, however intermittent rainfall again led to lower than normal crop yields; the second poor consecutive season compounding the difficulties caused by the first. Kiragga, however, the village bordering Nabikakala over the swamp, had enjoyed a fairly productive season, and this meant that many from Bukula made frequent trips there to purchase food. In early December, we were inundated with more juicy sweet mangoes than we could eat. Madina told me this often happened after a poor growing season – a bittersweet consequence.

Seasonality has been a common theme in development literature on livelihoods (Agarwal 1990; Chambers 1982; Chambers, Longhurst, and Pacey 1981; Ellis 2000: 58–9). Many such studies have highlighted the challenges seasons bring to agriculture, but also for health and markets.

Health

Health is closely wrapped up with the ability to make a living. Very often when I visited Madina she was complaining of some ailment or another. She was usually still working, albeit at a reduced capacity. On one particular occasion, she was complaining of breathing difficulties and yet was still amongst the coffee trees harvesting the

berries. There was always a notable difference in her mood on these occasions. She would be quieter, smiling less, and would spend the first ten minutes complaining about her infirmity. The experience of being ill makes it very difficult to feel happy, as was reiterated repeatedly to me:

It is difficult to be happy when you are sick. Look at me... I cannot move around much... cannot dig. I am just around my home.

(Munyalusoka, September 2013)

You cannot have happiness without health. No way. If God were to come and tell you that you are going to die the next day you will run! You cannot be happy when you are not healthy.

(Sowed, Moses' and Shaban's grandfather, August 2013)

As well as the unhappiness felt as a result of being ill, the reduced capacity to work makes subsistence much more difficult and causes worry. Especially if illness strikes at a key phase of the agricultural cycle, the inability or reduced ability to work in the garden can greatly harm the season's yields. In April 2013, during the planting season Kobusingye fell ill and for almost three weeks was unable to work in the garden. As she was the only member of the household who worked in the garden this resulted in a much smaller area than normal being cultivated. This worry, and the simple necessity to earn subsistence, frequently has the effect of forcing people to continue working when they are sick, thereby often prolonging the illness. On numerous occasions, I turned up to someone's home to find him or her ill and struggling to work. They would bemoan the fact that weeds were taking over their gardens and, if they were not able to clear them soon, then the crops would suffer. When she was suffering with chest pains, Madina's stubbornness to continue picking coffee berries while Namuli, Moses, and I all urged her to rest and recuperate is just one example of this. She asked us, 'If I do not do it, then who will?' She needed the money from selling the beans in order to buy food. Similarly, I found my friend John Kiwanuka continuing to work in the hot sun making charcoal despite a prolonged bout of malaria. He explained that he was struggling to feed his children and so had to keep working. Health is one of the key issues that disrupts the ability to make a livelihood, and this is one crucial reason why livelihoods are such a social endeavour.

Markets

A further major factor in the success of farming is the uncertainty of markets. Market forces are often a source of confusion, or rather frustration, with people expressing to me how, when they do manage to attain good crop yields, the price they receive for their surplus is much lower than normal. Moses told me:

It is difficult to get good prices. Prices for farmers' products go down, while the cost of everything else just goes up. So, in order to get my money back from planting forty kilogrammes of beans, I need to harvest much more than this – simply in terms of the price of the beans.

There is a double blow when the season is bad. Firstly, you do not have sufficient food, and secondly the price of buying food is then higher at a time when you already have less money due to the lack of crop surplus to sell. This is reflected too in seeds for the following season. Usually some beans, groundnuts, and maize are reserved from the harvest in order to plant next season, but with low yields people are forced to eat these, and are hit by the high cost of purchasing new seeds come planting time.

Additional problems present themselves with finding markets for 'non-typical' crops. Unless you can produce a lot of something, and thereby afford to pay for transport to the urban centres, it becomes very difficult to find a market for your crops. At the home where I lived, we had a small passion fruit plantation and, during the peak of their harvest, we collected a few hundred fruits every couple of days. During this period, a man from a nearby village came to collect these on his bicycle and cycled around the neighbouring villages selling them. If we had been able to sell the fruits directly to a market vendor in Lukaya or Kampala the price would have been much higher. I was discussing this with a close neighbour, Yusuf, a man from Busoga with three young children, and he lamented the fact that people in these villages do not grow a very diverse range of crops. He would like to grow aubergines for example, but because no others do so it would not be practical to get them to a market in town. He went on to make the point that 'if a trader comes to Nabikakala to buy something he will often give you a lower price because he has had to come "far"'. You have no choice but to accept'. I pointed out that if people were to work together then they could all

negotiate the prices and the trader would then have to increase what they would pay. He wholeheartedly agreed, saying that people in Busoga are more inclined to cooperate, but argued that people here do not want to do so. He said, ‘they all have *fitina*’, a word that combines jealousy with a dislike of seeing others doing well.

The most pertinent example of the problems created by this lack of cooperation is seen in the coffee trade. A large proportion of households have at least a few coffee trees and many, like Madina, have larger plantations. Freshly picked berries are sold usually as a filled 20-litre jerrycan. The immediate power over prices rests largely with coffee factories (the robusta coffee grown here is almost entirely used in the production of low-grade instant coffee granules), and with the mobile traders who act as go-betweens, travelling house-to-house on their motorbike or bicycle buying beans from villagers, before drying them and selling them to the factories. Because the villagers sell their coffee individually, it gives the traders the power to offer almost whichever price they desire, knowing that the grower has no choice but to sell, and it was very common to find people complaining about the low prices they were receiving for their berries. As an example, one day when I spoke to Madina after she had been harvesting coffee, she complained that the traders were only offering 8,000 shillings per jerrycan (about £2 at the time), whereas a few months prior they had been giving 11-12,000.

Land issues

One day in January 2014, Moses and I visited Madina and we could quickly tell there was something wrong. This time it was not a health problem; she said she felt physically fine. Instead, she was having some arguments about land. Whenever we went to Madina’s home, after sitting down and going through the greeting ritual, I would always stay quiet and let her begin speaking – she always had something to say. This time she explained at length about how the owners of her land were asking to have it back. This was a problem she alluded to the first time I met her, but since then she had not explained further.

Land tenure in Buganda is complicated.³ This is partly due, Goodfellow and Lindemann argue, to a ‘clash of institutions’ between the Buganda kingdom and the Ugandan state (2013). By the Uganda Agreement of 1900, land in Buganda was separated into areas of British ‘Crown Land’ (latterly ‘Public Land’), a share was designated as the *kabaka*’s own private property, and the rest was allotted to around 3,700 local Ganda chiefs (Englebert 2002: 352; Hanson 2003: 129–136). Allocated in square-mile – *mailo* – units, this land is a form of freehold tenure, much of which has been broken up over time into smaller lots due to inheritance, gifts, and sales (Okuku 2006: 8).⁴ With the creation of *mailo* land, the majority of cultivators became tenants of the *mailo* owners in a form of customary tenure (Marcus 1978: 513; Pedersen et al. 2012: 16). The plots these tenants live on are called *bibanja* (sing. *kibanja*). In 1928, the *Busuulu* and *Envujjo* Laws attempted to give *bibanja* holders greater rights to their land by setting a limit to the amount of rent the landlord could charge, ensuring that the tenant could not be evicted provided they continued cultivation, and could pass on their land to their heirs (Marcus 1978: 520; Okuku 2006: 9; Richards 1966: 27). Since then, a number of different acts and policies have attempted to reform land rights, culminating in the Land Act, 1998 and the Land Amendment Act, 2010. In their analysis of the latter, Claire Médard and Valérie Golaz argue that recent developments have actually made *bibanja* rights more precarious. They say that *bibanja* holders are increasingly being referred to as ‘squatters’ and struggle to provide the proof needed of their annual *busuulu* payments to landlords – one of the key conditions for securing their rights of tenure (2013: 554).

Madina’s land is a *kibanja* plot, the owners of which (the *mailo* holders) are a family from Bukula who own a huge swathe of the village. Much of this land they use for farming and cattle herding, and the rest is divided among many of the villagers. A

³ For a much fuller discussion see in particular (Englebert 2002; Goodfellow and Lindemann 2013; Médard and Golaz 2013; Okuku 2006; Pedersen et al. 2012).

⁴ As an indication of this, Richards (1966: 25–6) noted that the number of *mailo* holders increased from just under 4,000 in 1900 to around 100,000 by 1965.

major difference between Nabikakala and Bukula is that Nabikakala is dominated by large *mailo* landowners, whereas in Bukula there are far more small *kibanja* holders. I was told that tenants on a *kibanja* have, in theory, quite substantial rights over it, including being able to transfer it to others. While *mailo* owners can evict the tenant, they are supposed to reach an agreement to provide compensation for the value of the land and any property or other developments, including crops, upon it. This resulted from the separation, in the 1998 Act, of ownership of land and ownership of the developments on it (Goodfellow and Lindemann 2013: 18). Madina's *kibanja* has been in her family for well over thirty years and is agriculturally well developed with mature coffee trees, as well as substantial banana plantations and other longer-term trees and crops. She explained that the owners wanted to take the land back without giving them anything for it. Often *kibanja* holders either do not fully understand their rights on the land, or they do not have documentary evidence of this, and as such are disempowered relative to the *mailo* landowner, who is, in many cases, more wealthy. In the end, Madina appeased the owners by agreeing to return to them a small part of the land for nothing, but the fact that this has happened repeatedly in the past causes her to worry about the future.

Land wrangles are a common problem facing villagers. Rasmus Hundsbaek Pedersen et al. suggest that conflicts over land are more common in central Uganda than in other areas due to the overlapping rights of *mailo* owners and tenants (2012: 17). In Nabikakala, the Major, a former army officer who owns a large cattle farm in the village, has been involved in a long-running court battle to take large areas of land from other villagers – land that he claims belongs to him. Periodically, I would be told of disputes between neighbours over who owns a given portion of land. A poignant illustration of the concern over maintaining rights to your land is a sign on one plot, which is actually a sign seen quite commonly in the country, saying, 'This land is not for sale'.

It was explained to me that when villagers have land to which they are entitled long-term then they are able to develop it, much as Madina's family have done on her

land. However, Frank Place and Keijiro Otsuka argue that certain investments in land, such as coffee tree planting, can actually enhance land rights (2002: 125), and I was frequently told that using your land is important for maintaining rights over it. While most of the staple food crops can be grown in one season, or at most two, other crops may take much longer. To develop a banana plantation fully takes two or three years, coffee trees between three and five, and fruit trees often many years more. Having a wider variety of plants and trees under cultivation provides some extra security against crop failures, a more steady supply of foodstuffs, and greater chances to make some money. Someone who is just renting land on a season-by-season basis does not have a security of tenure that allows him or her to develop the farm more fully and limits the capacity to breed livestock. Someone with a *kibanja* arrangement, or especially those with *mailo* ownership, should have greater security, however the uncertainty surrounding security of tenure remains, and getting a fair settlement in a compensation agreement is by no means assured. Even for those with *mailo* land, there are still threats from others attempting to take the land, such as impostors ‘selling’ the land or rich and powerful individuals like the Major attempting to twist the judicial system to take it ‘legally’.

Other people

The final external influence on livelihood efforts that I want to discuss is the behaviour of other villagers. I focus here on some of the threats other people bring to livelihood security, however later in the chapter I go on to discuss some more positive aspects. One of the most common sources of friction between neighbours is other people’s livestock entering gardens and eating crops. This is usually put down to negligence, but there were often suspicions of it being intentional. This problem was widespread, but was more of an issue in Nabikakala than in Bukula due to the large numbers of cattle in the village. Particularly problematic were the cattle of the Major. Many people suggested the Major specifically instructed his workers to take the cattle into neighbouring gardens, thereby at once benefiting himself and causing others to suffer.

When I returned to Nabikakala from Scotland in July 2013, Kobusingye told me that the Major's cattle had come and destroyed their crops. Madina, as one of the residents of Bukula closest to the Major's land, also lost crops to his cattle. Disputes over such incidents are the responsibility of the village chairman unless residents are able to agree on compensation between themselves, although these compensation agreements are often left unpaid.

At times problems would be caused by negligence, while at others it would be more deliberately malign. Theft of produce was relatively common, especially of livestock. During my time in the village, Mpagi had several goats stolen and Ziwa's cow was taken. Another time, I was told of a woman having been badly beaten in Lugalama as punishment for stealing a large bunch of *matooke*. Other people told me of sabotage to their crops. One day when I went to speak to Munyalusoka, he indicated a swathe of burned grassland and said, 'You see, there are people who are jealous. They do not like it when they see someone doing something to benefit themselves'. He claimed that whoever had set the fire had hoped it would burn through their tomato garden and their house.

JEALOUSY

The problem of jealousy has already arisen in this chapter from my discussions with Yusuf about people's reluctance to cooperate. There are a number of Luganda terms used to refer to jealousy, the most common being *fitina*. Yusuf went on to complain about the landowners in Nabikakala who have large tracts of land entirely unused and covered in bush. He had asked them to be able to use some of the land for farming, offering to pay them with sacks of maize, but they had refused. He could not understand their reasons and could see only benefits in it for the landowners. He said, 'It is *fitina*. They do not want others to do well'.

These sentiments were echoed by others. In Bukula, Nakaferu makes beautiful small baskets and woven mats. Moses and I asked why she does not try to sell her

crafts. I suggested she make some kind of small shop and that it would be easier if there were a group of them in order to enhance the amount of stock. She replied that she would very much like to and had asked around a number of times but that no one in the villages wants to. She then corrected herself and said that they do want to but still do not do it. When I asked why she thought this was, she said she was not sure, but that some people say they do not want to get involved because they fear that others will not pull their weight. She said that people here do not want others to get on and make some money, even though they would also be benefiting.

In a discussion with Muzeeyi Ziwa about Uganda's development, he summed up *fitina*, saying that a major problem in the country is that 'people do not help each other. They are jealous of each other. If they see you getting something or doing something good they are not happy for you, they are jealous and wonder, "Why is it not me?"'

The notion of *fitina* expresses a contrast to the way I had understood jealousy as something closely akin to envy. John Rawls' distinction between jealousy (or grudgingness) as a desire to keep what one has and envy as the desire for what another has is helpful here (1971: 533). With *fitina*, like Rawls' jealousy, 'a person who is better off may wish those less fortunate than he to stay in their place' (1971: 533). *Fitina* is not just about wanting to keep what you have but is about not wanting others to achieve the same thing. It is about not wanting others to gain relative to yourself – either gaining something you already have, or gaining something neither of you have – and is therefore about wanting to keep or maintain the social position one has relative to others.

UNCERTAINTY AND WORRY

A central theme emerging in this chapter is the uncertainty and insecurity of livelihoods. Most of Madina's time, like that of most villagers, is taken up with the work required simply to ensure she can live. Nevertheless, this is precarious. We have seen that numerous factors can impinge on Madina's ability to make an acceptable

living. Cathy Farnworth (2012) has written about smallholder farmers in Madagascar who face many similar risks to their livelihoods. She tells of the deteriorating mental wellbeing described by her informants in the face of what they perceive as increasing uncertainty. Furthermore, economist Carol Graham (2012) has argued that uncertainty has a significantly detrimental effect on people's happiness, and for Vigh's young men in Guinea-Bissau a lack of uncertainty and insecurity are seen as 'the primary characteristics of being well' (2015: 102). In Nabikakala and Bukula, the insecurity of livelihoods causes worries (*mitawana*) and this dominated conversation when crops were struggling. Every day, people complained about not knowing how they were going to feed themselves and their families in the coming months. In addition, Mpagi explained to me about the worry it creates in terms of upholding social expectations of hospitality. I asked him how he felt when receiving visitors during difficult periods and he said, 'I am happy, but at the same time I worry how I can give them something'. As I explained in the previous chapter, one of the principal reasons people desire *embeera ennungi* is that it allows them to mitigate the effects of disruptions to their livelihoods, and thereby provides a feeling of greater comfort or security. As Kaytesi told me, when you have *embeera ennungi*, 'then you can be without worries'.

The theme of uncertainty remains subtly important throughout this thesis, and is significant not only in terms of securing a livelihood but is also a factor in the ability to try to make life better, as we shall see in the following two chapters in particular. The themes of uncertainty and insecurity are slightly different, and Whyte (1997) argues that in Bunyole her interlocutors sought security rather than certainty, a finding which reflects my assertions that *embeera ennungi* is fundamentally concerned with enablement and that villagers in Nabikakala and Bukula seek the security of a viable livelihood. A corollary theme to uncertainty is the degree of control, influence, or agency villagers have over their pursuits of wellbeing. This will recur through the following chapters and I will return to discuss it more fully in Chapter 7. As such, like Paolo Gaibazzi (2015), Elizabeth Cooper and David Pratten (2015: 1), and Whyte (1997) I seek to demonstrate the productive potential of uncertainty and the ways in

which my interlocutors engage with it in their attempts to live well. One way they are able to do so and to exercise some control over this is through work.

WORK

Kola ng'omuddu – olye ng'omwami

Work like a servant and you will eat like a king
(Namubiru, elderly resident of Bukula, April 2013)

I noted earlier Kaytesi's assertion that 'work is anything people do to allow them *okubeerawo*'. Work is important as it is the main variable in their livelihood efforts over which villagers have a substantial degree of control. Hard work is very highly valued in Buganda as evidenced by numerous proverbs, such as the one above, and also in the common greeting, '*gyebale*', which is a slightly abbreviated way of saying 'thank you for your work'. While it is clearly valued, pinning down exactly what constitutes work is difficult. Olivia Harris (2007: 140) writes about the surprise of people in her field site in rural Bolivia at her describing writing field notes as 'work' and her realisation that they understood the concept very differently from her. She advocates paying close attention to the contours of the concept of work in our fieldwork.

I had many discussions with people in the villages about the nature of work. In Luganda, the verb 'to work', *okukola*, is also used for 'to make' or 'to do'. While it is often used alone, the verb is frequently qualified with an additional noun meaning work – *okukola mulimu* (which can also be used in the plural *mirimu*). Madina's explanation for what counts as work was typical of most similar discussions. At first, she explained that 'Everything you do with your hands is work... You cannot do something which is not work'. Often it proved more useful to ask what was *not* considered to be work, and so I referred her back to a previous conversation in which we had been discussing *matatu*, a popular card game that very often involves gambling. She said, 'That is not work – because that *matatu* is bad... *Matatu* is not work because it cannot help you; it causes you problems'. This suggests that work is

anything you do which benefits you, a sentiment echoed by others:

Work is what we do to try to get *embeera ennungi*.

(Nantongo, elderly woman living in Bukula, November 2013)

Work is something that you can do to benefit after doing it.

(Mpigi, January 2014, in English)

The more I thought about it, the more I realised that this was a difficult question to ask of my interlocutors and that I myself would struggle to accurately define work. However, these answers made sense. Work is something you do in order firstly to keep yourself and your dependents alive (*okubeerawo*), but also in order to improve your life (pursuing *embeera ennungi*). It is not simply about surviving, but about trying to achieve the kind of life you desire.

Work clearly has this instrumental aspect but, as Harris (2007) has argued, it is important to look too at the value work itself carries. In Buganda, your willingness to work affects what others think of you. Nantongo also said to me that ‘It is important to work, otherwise people will think that you are not good... a *muyaye*’. A *muyaye* is a wide-ranging term that in English would encompass layabouts, delinquents, or idlers. It may be used to refer to someone who is seen to be lazy, perhaps involved in petty crime, or who partakes in alcohol or other soft drugs such as cannabis or *miraa*. The importance of work relates to the value of contributing to communal livelihood efforts but also retaining a degree of self-reliance and not taking unfair advantage of others.

Immaculate Kizza’s wonderful book on Ganda oral tradition offers a proverb which helps us understand this aspect of the value of work: *Mazzi masabe – tegamala nnyonta* (If you keep on requesting people to give you water to drink, you can never quench your thirst) (2010: 62). As Kizza elaborates, ‘Begging is not a problem solving strategy; it simply postpones your needs and often leaves you thirsting for more. This proverb encourages people to work hard for what they want instead of depending on others’ (p. 62).

Madina frequently complained to me about Bumali, the grandson who lived with her, and his lack of assistance around the home and garden. Some would call him a

myaye. She explained that Bumali does not want to work and just spends the day wandering the villages and hanging around with his friends:

He sometimes gets some work digging [farming] for someone so that he can make some money to go to the disco at Nalwewuba. But maybe he will end up stealing from people in order to go there. He just comes home to eat.

When I asked why she does not refuse him food unless he works more at home, she replied that if she did not then he would just steal from others.

Work is not the only way of ensuring a livelihood, but it is largely an honest and socially approved one. Other means include theft, witchcraft, or taking advantage of others, as Bumali seems to do. These, however, are premised on gain at others' expense, and as a result are morally problematic. Work is acceptable because it is visible and legitimate. Others can see how you have gained. Work, or at least honest work, is a way to secure your livelihood that does not generally cause any harm to others and upholds the ideal of not depending on others.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that if everyone works honestly then no social problems arise. Others may still be jealous or feel aggrieved at their relative lack of success. Faizo, a smartly dressed young man who lived in Lugalama, told me that 'In the whole world, it is not possible for someone to do well without another suffering'. He went on to provide an example of someone opening up a small shop, and made the point that this would cause other shop keepers to feel bad due to worries about competition and loss of custom, as well as potentially *fitina*. He illustrated this with a proverb: *Ewabeera ekirungi n'ekibi kibaawo* (Wherever there is good, there is also bad). Despite this, work is seen to be a productive and worthwhile use of time and people who work little, like Bumali, are seen to be not using their time well.

Work and leisure

Omugagga tagenda mu itale

A rich man does not go to the grazing ground
(Sowed, September 2013)

Often when I was sitting at Moses' home in mid-afternoon waiting for him to return

from his teaching, I would see his grandfather, Sowedi, taking two jerrycans of water out to his few cattle that he leaves to graze in the nearby scrubland. One day, as he passed me with the jerrycans sloshing in his trundling wheelbarrow, he smiled and said the above phrase, alluding to a discussion we had had the day before about what it means to be rich. This phrase stuck in my head and bugged me for months afterwards. I could see what Sowedi meant – a rich man would most likely have a *mulaalo* (herder) to take care of his animals. But then, I wondered, what is the rich man doing? Is he not with the cattle because he is at leisure, or is he engaged in other business dealings? If he were to choose to go to the animals, would this be work or would it be leisure? Would it be, in Robert Stebbins' terms, 'serious leisure' (1982)?

In his work on happiness in the Peruvian Amazon, Walker argues that people 'do not rigidly distinguish between work and free time, nor do they see leisure as the more enjoyable of the two' (2015: 183). He goes on to say that affluence for the Urarina comes from finding pleasure and satisfaction in their work (p. 183). In Nabikakala and Bukula it was difficult to define what was *not* work and we struggled to come up with a term in Luganda approximating 'fun', 'leisure', or 'pleasure'. The closest I was able to find in discussion with bilingual Baganda was the verb *okunyumirwa*, or 'to enjoy'. The main activities (for adults) in the village I would class as leisure activities were visiting neighbours, drinking alcohol, and playing football and cards. I believe the key factor in people's opinion about various activities were whether they regarded it as useful or beneficial. A conversation with Matovu will help clarify.

Matovu is an elderly man originally from Burundi, rarely seen without his stick and blue hat. His home was on one of the main paths through Bukula and I would see him almost daily. One day, Moses and I found him sitting, pounding dried tobacco leaves and sifting it through a piece of fine-grained fabric to make *kagolo*, a kind of snuff tobacco many of the men carry around with them in small dried banana-leaf packages. Matovu said that he does not enjoy this work because he ends up breathing in the powder and it makes his chest feel bad. He does it just in order to make a little extra money. A short time into our conversation, I asked him if he does anything

simply for enjoyment and he replied that it is not good to do something without a purpose. I then asked why he often just sits doing nothing, to which he explained, ‘You cannot stand all the time. God made us so that when we are very young we sleep a lot, and then when we grow up we have to replace this with something’. We went on to discuss whether football is a good use of time because, I pointed out, the main purpose is just to enjoy it. Matovu countered that there is a purpose to football, using the wonderful phrase *okukyamusa omusaayi*, or ‘to excite the blood’, which Moses translated to me as ‘to make you happy’.

I also asked Matovu whether there was any work he enjoyed doing. He told me that he enjoyed digging, or rather that he used to before he became old, because of the anticipation of getting something from it. This sentiment was expressed by various people. Madina told me, ‘When I am harvesting coffee, I feel very very happy, because I know that I am going to be able to get something that I want’. Kobusingye, too, explained to me her enjoyment of ‘digging’ because she knew it would give her food. A great pleasure can be taken in doing things that you feel can improve life, in anticipation of future rewards (Archambault 2015). In a word-association exercise with the Tswana, Alverson found ‘happiness’ to be one of the two words most frequently associated to ‘work’ (1978: 119). When Matovu or Kobusingye are working in their gardens, they do not know what the season will bring, whether their crops will produce good yields. And when Madina is picking her coffee, she does not know how much the trader will offer her for what she has collected. However, the hope is there, reflecting the hope and ‘spirit of meliorism’ Whyte (1997: 232) found in her fieldwork in Eastern Uganda.

THE SOCIAL NATURE OF LIVELIHOODS

Livelihoods, and by extension the quest to live well, are a social concern. We have seen a number of ways in which other people have the capacity to greatly affect livelihood efforts. I focused earlier primarily on ways others can disrupt livelihoods

strategies, however other people, in particular one's kin, also play a positive role in these efforts, as evidenced by the household ideal of having multiple people working, both to grow food and to earn money. People, too, help to overcome many of the uncertainties laid out above. In a state with limited support for the elderly or infirm, these people rely on others to care for them.

I mentioned earlier the time when my Ugandan 'mum', Kobusingye, fell ill and was unable to work in the garden or cook food. Within one or two days, the family sent one of her sons, Musoke, to come and assist and to care for her and Ziwa, who was also sick. People in the villages commonly commented to me on how the Ziwa family had an excellent capacity to support each other and to assist the parents when necessary. On numerous occasions when Muzeeyi Ziwa's health deteriorated, one or other of the sons would drive from Kampala, often arriving late at night, and take him to the clinic. This level of support was often impossible for other families and there seemed to be a mix of respect and jealousy among others in the village in regard to this.

This provision of support extends beyond providing care when a family member is ill. In poor agricultural seasons, urban dwelling family members who are able to will often bring maize flour, rice, or dried beans or groundnut powder to help their kin in the village overcome food shortages. Again, for a family such as the Ziwas, this is a possibility that many of the other families in the village do not have. While helping them to get through food shortages it also reduces to some extent the worry caused by poor yields. During my two seasons in Nabikakala, these dried goods brought by family in Kampala were a necessity to keep those of us in the household fed, with produce from the garden fairly quickly running out due to a combination of the poor weather, Kobusingye's sickness, and the Major's cattle taking the bulk of the maize crop. That said, this exchange of food works two ways. In the more productive seasons, visiting family members would frequently leave laden with surplus cassava, bananas, or pumpkins, thereby reducing their food costs in the city.

However, it is not only these staple foodstuffs that are sometimes provided by

kin living and earning elsewhere. Visitors would often bring other small essentials such as soap, salt, or sugar, but would also bring some treats. Sometimes I visited people after they had received a visitor from town and they would typically have bread and Blueband (the ubiquitous margarine-type spread) or perhaps some Coca-Cola or other soda. The delight on their faces at receiving these treats was visible every time.

The fact that people's livelihoods are intertwined is no great surprise. Pursuing a livelihood, or *embeera ennungi*, or whatever else a person seeks as part of their efforts to live well is never done in isolation, and this pursuit will necessarily have an impact on others. As such, this is a moral project involving the question of how we can live well together, reflecting Aaron Ahuvia, et al.'s (2015) observation that people are 'co-responsible' for pursuing wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I introduced Madina Nabawesi in order to help explore some of the issues villagers face in terms of working to maintain a livelihood. I introduced the concept of *okubeerawo* as the key immediate aim for the work villagers undertake on a daily basis, explaining that this goes somewhat beyond mere survival to imply living (reasonably) well. Following this, I outlined the primary two intertwined strategies for pursuing this aim, of farming and of money-making, and went on to examine a number of the factors that serve to make maintaining a livelihood an uncertain endeavour. The primary safety net for the precarious nature of pursuing a livelihood is the importance of and reliance upon others, both friends and, more importantly, kin and clan relations.

The aim of this chapter has been twofold. Firstly, I have sought to discuss some of the most immanent issues facing villagers in their daily lives, and this will serve as important context informing much of the rest of the thesis. Secondly, these issues have a very real and direct impact on the ability to live well. Being able to effectively secure a livelihood is a necessary step before any attempts to make life better or more meaningful.

Finally, this chapter has explicitly discussed or introduced a number of key themes of this thesis. Many of these themes pertain to the social nature of the pursuit of wellbeing, including jealousy, morality, the comparison of your life relative to others, and respect and others' opinion of you. Additionally, the theme of uncertainty is closely related to the concept of gratification or reward deferral, in particular through the themes of work and leisure.

Chapter 3 - ASPIRATIONS

Asuubira, akira aloota

One who has hope is better than one who just dreams
(Lule 2006: 66)

A key aspect of the quest to live well is how we think about the future. What do we want to do, to achieve, or to have? What do we aspire to? In Nabikakala and Bukula, it is no different. We have seen in the previous chapters a little of this, such as the desire for *embeera ennungi*, but in this chapter I want to turn to look more closely at aspirations and the role these play in people's attempts to live well. I argue that aspiration is a particular kind of orientation to the future, denoting a kind of hopeful expectation.

The Luganda term most akin to aspiration is *okusuubira*. Frequently translated as both 'to hope' and 'to expect', it therefore incorporates something both desirable and achievable. This is reflected in the proverb above. Lule elaborates, 'It is better to have hope – which inspires one to act – than to keep building castles in the air' (2006: 66). Kizza, however, provides a slightly fuller explanation:

This philosophical proverb preferring hoping to dreaming encourages people to maintain a positive attitude in times of adversity. A person who maintains hope keeps alive the possibility of getting what one wants as opposed to one who regards such desires as dreams. Dreaming is more passive since dreams are elusive, fleeting subconscious activities, whereas one has to be totally awake, active and in control to keep hope alive. (2010: 82)

While Lule and Kizza speak of 'hope', I would argue that 'aspiration' more helpfully reflects the meaning of *okusuubira*. The final sentence of Kizza's explanation is particularly informative. Aspiring is an active process in which you must engage. It demands action. That hope is passive is a point highlighted by Victor Crapanzano as he draws on Walter Pater to explicitly contrast 'hope' and 'desire', the latter of which, he says, 'presupposes human agency'. Hope, on the other hand, relies on the agency of another – be it God, fate, chance, or someone else (2003: 6). Crapanzano argues that the notion of hope as passive has resulted in a neglect of the topic within social science,

which has focused more on desires (p. 5) and, I might add, on aspirations. The other prominent anthropological work on hope is from Hirokazu Miyazaki (2004, 2006). Furthermore, you must have a suitable level of control over your circumstances in order to pursue your hopes effectively. In this chapter, I will explore the nature of aspiration in Nabikakala and Bukula and demonstrate the importance of the ability to pursue aspirations. Before doing so, I want to explain why aspirations are a productive area of study through which to further our understanding of wellbeing in the villages.

WHY ASPIRATION?

Aspirations are about how people conceive of a future. ‘Every culture’, Robertson says, ‘embodies counterfactual images of a happier, more companionable, and more rewarding way of life’ (1984: 194), and in his chapter ‘The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition’, Arjun Appadurai tells us that ‘aspirations about the good life, about health and happiness, exist in all societies’ (2004: 67). Aspirations sit at the nexus between individual and social wants and desires for the future and the values and norms of a specific socio-cultural context. People have ideas for the future, for how they might like their life to be, but these are multiple, contested, intertwined, and very often unclear. What a focus on aspirations allows us to do is not so much to see what an ‘ideal’ life or future would look like, but instead permits us to explore the complexity of people’s current hopes and expectations, and of the tensions people face as they navigate their way through life, trying to live well. It is not about a utopia but about *possibilities* and, largely, fairly short- or medium-term concerns. For even if our primary aspirations are only likely to be realised in the long term or perhaps even posthumously, these will inevitably have an impact on how we live our life in the present. To take a simple example, and as we shall see in the following chapter, as a Jehovah’s Witness Kaytesi aspires to be resurrected after her death to enter *ensi empya*, the new world. In order to do so she must live her life continually with this in mind and in an appropriate manner in order to achieve this aim.

While some aspirations are concerned with ensuring a viable and secure livelihood, examining aspirations takes us beyond this to look at some of the other factors relevant in living a good life. Hope is a key idea in life among those in my field site and there seems to be a pervasive underlying belief that life will get better. Moses told me at one point that people here have many children because ‘they hope [or expect] to get enough money to care for them and educate them. They are always hopeful’. Aspiration is fundamentally optimistic, reliant on the belief that a better life is possible. Whyte found something similar among the Banyole, contending however that what she observed was a ‘spirit not of optimism but of meliorism’ (1997: 232). She goes on to define this by quoting William James’s description of meliorism as the attitude that ‘improvement is at least possible’ (James cited in Whyte 1997: 232). Aspirations are, naturally, future-oriented, but draw on one’s past and present, as well as being informed by the wider socio-cultural milieu, and religious or spiritual beliefs.

Aspirations, though, vary widely in the villages, influenced by, among other things, a person’s gender and stage of the life course. My aim in this chapter is to discuss how aspirations are shaped and to demonstrate why they are important and how the capacity to pursue aspirations links to wellbeing in Nabikakala and Bukula. Achievable aspirations provide hope and aspiring itself therefore has an intrinsic value. In order to do this, rather than attempt to provide a description of all the aspirations across the diverse range of people in the village, I focus primarily on one man, Shaban, and explore some of his most notable current aspirations. My intention through this is to demonstrate both the complexities of these aspirations and the importance of the ability to pursue these effectively.

SHABAN

Tekiwomera mamata abiri

What is tasty for one mouth may not be that delicious for another
(Kizza 2010: 85)

Shaban loves language. Over the course of my stay in the area I spent many hours with

him, Moses (his brother), and Sowedi (his grandfather) discussing the differences in usage between English and Luganda words and phrases. Shaban understands English to a certain extent, but struggles with speaking it. This particular proverb was one of his favourites. He had heard from somewhere the English equivalent, ‘one man’s meat is another man’s poison’, and it greatly amused him, particularly when he then translated it directly into Luganda. Shaban first raised this proverb during a conversation about what people in the area aim to achieve. He explained that he found it difficult to comment because aims vary widely from person to person. He was, however, happy to talk at length about his own hopes and aspirations. Before returning to this, allow me to introduce Shaban.

Sempijja Shaban lives alone in Lugalama in a small two-roomed house that he constructed himself, with one room serving as the bedroom, and the other being where he cooks and stores some tools and materials. Moses and I agreed that it was more appropriate conducting our recorded discussions in Shaban’s house rather than at Moses and Sowedi’s home, allowing Shaban to be more open out of earshot of his grandfather and other villagers. In addition, our discussions were greatly helped by Moses and Shaban’s ease with each other. On each of our trips, the three of us sat in the same configuration on the floor of the bedroom – Shaban next to his bed against the sidewall of the house, and Moses and I on a mat against the front wall.

Shaban was at this point 24 and is the son of a Munyankole man and a Muganda woman. He did not know his father until he was a young adult, and his mother left Kiti, where Shaban was born, to move to Kampala when he was just two or three years old. Shaban grew up in a Muslim household with Sowedi, with whom he has lived for the majority of his life. He and Moses remained living in Kiti with Sowedi until Shaban was around 16, before moving with him to Bukula. Shaban said, ‘I guess I am a Munyankole [as ethnic affiliation is patrilineal], but I feel Muganda. I was brought up in Buganda with my grandparents, who are both real Baganda’.



Figure 3-1: Shaban during the mango season with Mpagi's son

Throughout his life, Shaban's parents have been unable or unwilling to help financially. He managed to complete primary school, but there was insufficient money for him to continue his formal education. Thankfully, Sowedi was able to help a little and sent him for carpentry training in Lukaya. After six months, Shaban broke his hand, and when it healed, Sowedi did not want him to return to the training. This was partly due to the distance from Kiti and partly because the carpenter also employed Sowedi's son and apparently disliked him. Shaban spent some time helping at home in the gardens, before Sowedi arranged for him to train with Steven, the local radio repairman. After some months, he 'got some problems' and the family decided it would be good for him to go to Kampala, where he lived with a maternal aunt. Shaban did not explain the nature of these 'problems' but did tell me it followed from a girl he had been seeing becoming pregnant.

In Kampala, Shaban's aunt arranged for him to work as a labourer on a building site, a job he did not enjoy. However, being in the capital allowed him to make contact with and meet his father for the first time:

My mum gave me the phone number of my father and I got in touch with him, explaining whom I was and that I would like to get to know him. We arranged to meet the next day. He told me how he would dress so I could know him.

His father was a trader and asked Shaban to work with him, so Shaban moved to Gulu in the north of the country to sell clothes brought from Kampala by his father. Shaban found this period tough as the language spoken in the town, Acholi, is from a different language group to any language he knows. Initially he worked from a shop, but after a dispute with the local council had to begin selling door-to-door. The language difficulties, combined with health problems and the decisions of many of his new friends to move to Kampala, prompted him to tell his father that he would like to return to the village: 'I did not want to go back to Kampala because I had only been a labourer, and finding work was difficult'.

Shaban returned to live with Sowedi and he helped in the gardens and with the animals. After about a year, an opportunity came up with an international development organisation for three months free training as a builder in Kiti. Upon completion, he received a certificate:

I was very happy because I was ranked fourth after the final exam. The best people were able to continue with the organisation and we were given jobs constructing houses they were building for people in different areas of Masaka District. It was good because this helped us to continue learning.

Since then, the skills Shaban and his contemporaries developed through this scheme have allowed them to continue working as builders on an ad-hoc basis in the local area: 'If someone gets some work they will call their friends to work together'. By its nature, this work is uncertain and unreliable. At times, Shaban may have plenty work while at others he may go two months with nothing. He told me that this unpredictability hampers his ability to make plans and pursue his aims.

In 2009, with money he saved working for this organisation, Shaban succeeded

in purchasing his own small piece of land in Lugalama, very close to Nalwewuba: ‘I asked Muzeeyi [Sowed] for some ant hills so I could make bricks. He agreed, and I made very many, enough for my house and to sell some to allow me to buy some other materials’.⁵ By 2011, the house was ready and Shaban moved to his new home. His plot is small, with space only for the house and to grow a small amount of maize. If he has some money, and is not too busy with building work, he will rent some land during the growing season in order to grow crops.

Shaban now frequently sees his first son as he goes to the primary school where Mpagi and Moses work, very close to Shaban’s home. In 2012, he had a second child, with a woman in a neighbouring village, although he is not currently together with this woman.

Shaban concluded our discussion about his life by saying:

Now I am remaining with only one thing – getting married. But I am still trying to prepare my *embeera*. Our parents did not plan well for their children. We have grown up without them while they have been trying to find money but not really getting. Most parents are able to leave their children properties when they die, but for us there will not be, so we are having to do things for ourselves.

This last quote points to some of the things that Shaban aspires to in the coming years, namely getting married, having children and being able to care for them effectively, and having his own property. It also demonstrates how Shaban’s own history has played a role in shaping his aspirations in his wish to ‘prepare’ his *embeera* – a result of the inability of his own parents to do so. I will turn now to look more closely at how Shaban speaks about his future.

SHABAN’S ASPIRATIONS

Throughout my fieldwork, I used a range of different approaches to gain insight into people’s aspirations, and I found it very easy to talk with Shaban about his ideas for the future. One question that was particularly useful was to ask my interlocutors how

⁵ The high clay content makes ant hill soil an excellent building material.

they hoped their life would be in five years' time. When I asked this to Shaban, he explained that the main things he wanted were a bigger house, a better mode of transport, and to have found a wife and to have started having children with her.

A second way of looking at this is to consider how he understands *embeera ennungi*. He said, 'to have *embeera ennungi* – that's my hope'. He explained that few people in the area could be said to have *embeera ennungi*. However, while it is not easy to achieve, it is possible. Shaban describes it as having a regular income and being able to provide well for your children, as well as being in a position where you are not powerless and where you are able to have a degree of control over your life. Reflecting the discussion in Chapter 1, *embeera ennungi* for Shaban appears to be about enablement and security over his livelihood.

A further manner in which to explore Shaban's aspirations is to examine what things he describes as 'needs'. These include a house and land for cultivation, a vehicle, money and a regular income, health, and to be able to look after his children. Evidently, some of these 'needs' Shaban already has – his health, house and land, a vehicle (a bicycle), and some income. Nonetheless, apart from perhaps his health, he does not feel any of these are currently good enough.

Of course, talking about the future in these ways is always somewhat hypothetical and is not necessarily representative of what Shaban actually wants. Responding to questions such as 'how would you like your life to be in five years' time?' forces the respondent to give a more coherent answer than is perhaps in their mind. While some people in the world may have very firm plans for their future, I believe most people do not have such well-formed ideas. We have ill-defined ideas probably, or perhaps even almost none at all, and attempting to improve our lives involves taking advantage of opportunities as they present themselves. As Susanne Højlund et al. say, 'Futures are imagined in the present and will always be visions, hypotheses with an element of uncertainty' (2011: 54). Those ideas we do have are complex and inconsistent – a largely messy assortment of fragments of imagined futures that we may not be sure we really want, or with which the achievement of one aspiration precludes or hinders the

pursuit of another.

Nonetheless, it is telling that while Shaban was not able to give precise details, he was still very readily able to list a few more general aspirations, and these were relatively coherent across the different questions asked, from a variety of interview sessions. In the section that follows, I will go on to discuss two of Shaban's main aspirations – to have children, and to upgrade his home and land. While initially these desires may appear straightforward, perhaps even obvious, I explore the meanings behind them and how they make sense in relation to both Shaban's history and the social context in which he lives and has been brought up. Although I have highlighted these aspirations from my interactions with Shaban, both are desires that came up frequently in my conversations in the villages.

THE SHAPING OF ASPIRATIONS

While I have presented Shaban's aspirations from his own perspective, we must remember that aspirations are never just about the individual (Appadurai 2004). Hopes and desires for the future are formed in comparison with, in conversation with, and in negotiation with other people and, as such, aspirations are always social. A person's aspirations can be concerned with improving the lives of others even to the potential detriment of his or her own. Aspirations are frequently collective and not just about individual desires. As such, aspirations, and their pursuit, have a moral dimension. Karlström (2004) has argued that the link between collective aspirations and morality has not been studied enough, and in his own work he takes a historical anthropological approach to look at collective aspirations to modernity in Buganda. Furthermore, as Appadurai reminds us, 'aspirations to the good life are part of some sort of system of ideas' (2004: 67). Aspirations are not simply plucked from thin air, but they make sense within a given socio-cultural context. Finally, aspirations are rarely discrete but are tied up with and implicated in others. For example, Shaban's aspiration for children is interlinked with his wish to marry, to earn a regular decent income and improve his

embeera, and to have a larger piece of land.

The importance of a house and land

The first of Shaban's key aspirations or goals that I want to discuss is his desire for a larger plot of land and a larger house. In comparison with many of his contemporaries, he is already doing fairly well in that he has his own land and has constructed his own home. Many other men of a similar age remain living on their parents' land, although they can expect to inherit some of this land upon their father's death. Additionally, Shaban's well-constructed brick house compares favourably with the mud houses of many of his close peers in the area, such as that of Mpagi.



Figure 3-2: Shaban outside his house

Nonetheless, the land he has is small and, aside from growing a little maize, is insufficient for farming. Self-reliance is highly valued in Buganda and long-term tenure over land is of particular importance to enable a person to make full use of its agricultural potential. If you are forced, as Shaban is, to use other people's land, either by renting directly, by giving them a share of the crops or profits, or simply being allowed to use the land for free, it remains the fact that it is not your land, and the owner is able to take it back at any time. While this is unlikely to happen during an

agricultural season, it nevertheless means that you are restricted to growing seasonal crops such as maize, beans, and groundnuts. Planting *matooke* bananas (the main and most popular staple food) is difficult, as they will take a year or more to bear fruit, and planting other longer-term crops such as coffee or fruit trees is risky, as you may never see them become productive. Owning your own land allows you greater control over your means of production, and the opportunity to diversify your crops. There is, therefore, also value in larger land in terms of providing greater livelihood security.

Shaban describes his land, in English, as a ‘plot’. He explained that he was able to attain the land when the holder of a larger *kibanja* agreed to portion off a small section of his land. He said that when this happens the tenant of the ‘plot’ does not necessarily have to meet the real owner of the land, although it is good to do so. Because it is so small, Shaban said that you cannot really call his land a *kibanja*, although he explained that his rights remain the same as with a *kibanja*. He therefore has substantial rights over the land and a greater degree of security in his land tenure than he would were he renting on a more ad-hoc basis (as some in the village do). Nonetheless, he says he is still reliant on neither the holder of the *kibanja*, nor the owner of the *mailo* land of which it is part, demanding the land back, although in this case they would have to recompense him for the value of the property and cultivation on the land. Ultimately, Shaban would like to have his own piece of *mailo* land. While this is theoretically possible, *mailo* land is far more expensive than a *kibanja*, and *mailo* landowners are rarely willing to sell. A larger *kibanja* would therefore be a more realistic possibility.

However, rights and aspirations to land are not simply about enablement, either to make a living or to pursue your aspirations; land also raises your standing in the community.

{Shaban} Now they know you are the owner, which means you have earned and saved some money. That is the period when people start to respect you, and to trust in you more. If you ask someone to lend you some money they can agree because they know you have your own place and cannot just migrate.

{Stephen} So do they think you are a better person?

{Shaban} Yes, they think you are a good person.

Throughout my fieldwork, I found that people typically expressed a respect for the large land owners in the villages so long as they treated others well. Nonetheless, some of these large landowners did not do so, as we saw in Madina's problems with the owners of her *kibanja*.

Even though my focus here is on the importance of a house and land for Shaban, it is worth noting the striking difference between men's and women's rights to property. It is rare, though not impossible, for a woman to be the titleholder of land. If a man dies, one or more of his sons typically inherits any property. For the widow, such as in Madina's case, this is not usually a problem as the sons are generally happy for their mother to remain on the land. However, from time to time women may be 'chased' from the land, perhaps if the inheritor is not her own son.

We can see that Shaban's aspiration to own a larger area of land stems from a variety of different factors. Securing long-term tenure over land, ideally *mailo* ownership but more likely *kibanja* tenancy, helps provide greater livelihood security and affords respect in the community. A larger area of land increases these benefits and allows for greater diversification of crops and possibly cash crops such as coffee. For a single man, the land Shaban has now is sufficient since he earns his living largely from his building work, however to have a family he ideally needs a larger area of land on which to grow food and bring in additional income. Shaban also feels keenly the necessity to have something to pass on to his offspring since he has not had this benefit from his parents. This leads us into the second key aspiration I want to discuss – having children.

The importance of children

Shaban told me many times of his desire to have children. The aspiration to have children is central to life in the villages, where choosing to remain without children is incomprehensible. Roscoe notes that 'a woman who had no children was despised' (1965 [1911]: 46), but for a man, too, not having children is undesirable. Households

in the villages typically have between 6-10 children, and some elderly men have had tens of children in their lifetimes.⁶ The reason for the aspiration for children is a complex intersection of individual desires, societal and clan aspirations, and God's grace. Importantly, having children brings personal benefits but also brings benefits to the clan and Buganda as a whole.

One reason people want children is for their own future benefit. In old age, or indeed in sickness, the lack of state-provided care means people are reliant on others, generally their children, or sometimes grandchildren. The proverb, *Gwosenvuza mubuto – akusenvuza mubukadde* (The child you teach to walk in infancy helps you to walk in your old age) (Kizza 2010: 67), reflects this. Namubiru, a woman of around sixty in Bukula, told me that her *embeera* is not bad because, even though she is becoming old, her children have grown up and can help her with staples such as tea or sugar. Even more illustrative of the importance of children for care was a conversation with Mugema, an elderly neighbour of Mpagi, about another old man who was sick. Mugema told me that this man had only two daughters and no sons. He explained that this creates problems because the daughters marry and frequently move away, following the norm of virilocality. Mugema said that you therefore need sons to help look after you in old age. I met his own son a few times. Musoke was a *boda-boda* (motorbike taxi) driver in Kampala but he was building a house close to that of his parents and intending to move back to Bukula. He told me, 'they [his parents] don't have *embeera ennungi*, but I do a bit more. I want to come back to help look after them'. Kyango went further and said that having *many* children is important because 'if you have only two children perhaps neither will think to look after their parents. When you have more children you have more chance that at least two or three will try to help you'. Whether a young man like Shaban is consciously planning for his old age through his desire to have children I am not sure, however we can see here one way in

⁶ Although not a direct comparison, the data from the 2014 national census indicates a fertility rate for Uganda as a whole of 5.8 live births per woman (Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016: 16).

which the norm of having children makes sense in the context of the villages.

A second key factor in the need to have children is the question of succession or continuity of the individual and of the clan. In Buganda, an adult who has not ‘produced’ a child does not normally receive a *musika* (an heir who takes the deceased’s place in the clan hierarchy), is subsequently quickly forgotten, and is seen to have effectively wasted their life. Having children is necessary to securing a continued existence (being ‘resurrected’) after death, as we shall see in greater detail in Chapter 6. Furthermore, it is regarded as a duty or a service to the clan and the kingdom as a whole. Ivan, a young man in Bukula, told me that people here have many children ‘for the *kika* [clan], because we want to expand our *kika*’.

With his first-born, a son, Shaban has secured the continuity of his lineage after he dies and, in doing so, he has earned himself some respect from the clan and the other villagers. However, the fact that Shaban has had these children outside of a relationship recognised as marriage may diminish the social capital the children bring, and the ‘problems’ he talked of as a result of this first pregnancy suggest that some people evidently did not approve. ‘Marriage’ in Buganda is a relative concept and even couples who are cohabiting without having gone through any form of marriage ceremony may refer to themselves as married (Nabaitu, Bachengana., and Seeley 1994: 243). Nonetheless, for a man to have children outside of marriage is common, even expected. Gysels, Pool, and Nnalusiba note, from a study close to my field site, that men are seen to be ‘naturally promiscuous’ and that ‘it is culturally appropriate [for men] to have extramarital affairs’ (2002: 182). However, Kilbride tells us that ‘children born “outside” are sometimes a source of strain in the home’ (1979: 238), and so, although Shaban was not married to either of the mothers of his children, this suggests that despite the expectation for men to be promiscuous it can nevertheless bring problems.

As a result of this relative promiscuity, and due to the patrilineal descent system, a woman may commonly end up caring for children to whom she herself has not given birth. In many households in the villages this was the case, where a woman had either

decided to leave or the man had sent her away and the man had found a new wife. Children ‘belong’ to the father, and so usually remain with him. In Shaban’s case, because he was not married, the two children have remained with their mothers. Nonetheless, these are still deemed legitimate children of Shaban because, as Richards says, ‘the child of a casual union belonged, and belongs to the *genitor*: not to the man acting as *pater*’ (1966: 92, emphasis in original).

Finally, and tied up with the above, children bring respect. I would argue that in Buganda you are not considered a full adult until you have had a child. My Luganda teacher during my first month in Kampala told me that ‘people who do not have children can be irresponsible’. Moreover, Sowedi, Shaban’s grandfather, explained that people need to get married and have children because it is a ‘responsibility’ and this responsibility brings respect, adding that ‘you need to have the respect of other people’. Shaban himself said, ‘If someone has no children, people can look at you as if you are strange. They look at that person and think, “Eh, what’s with that guy?”’

When I discussed with Shaban his desire to have children, he strongly expressed, much like his brother Moses, the importance of delaying doing so until you are in a situation in which you are able to care for them effectively. He believes, as we saw in the outline of his aspirations, that it is important to be able to provide food and suitable shelter for his offspring and to be able to educate them well. He does not feel he is currently in this situation. However, Shaban already has two children. When I asked him about this apparent contradiction, he said that you have to take what God gives you when he gives it. You cannot know what will happen in the future; you may die young and before you feel you are in a good enough situation to have children. These sentiments are reflected in the proverb, *Katonda kyakuwa – togaana* (You cannot refuse to take whatever God gives you) (Kizza 2010: 73). Therefore, it is important to take the opportunity to have children when you can. It would be worse to die childless than to have one in less than favourable circumstances.

Furthermore, despite his declaration about wanting to wait until he achieves a more suitable *embeera*, Shaban would like more children, even if things do not

improve. He said, 'If life does not really improve then I could produce six, but I need to keep good spaces between them so I can look after them well. But if I have *embeera ennungi*, if God gives me a good life, then I want many... more than ten'.

We can see from this discussion that, like the desire to own land, the aspiration to have children is a complex product of personal and social interest. Children help look after you when you age and ensure your 'resurrection' upon your death. Additionally, you are helping to continue and strengthen the clan and Buganda as a whole. Finally, a child is a gift from God, and this is considered a blessing (*mukisa*). While having children enriches lives in the villages in these ways, a growing body of cross-cultural research suggests that parenthood actually has a negative effect on wellbeing or life satisfaction (Hansen 2012; Stanca 2012). Nonetheless, in Buganda, choosing not to have children as a means of increasing your happiness would not be countenanced and I believe it would be very difficult for someone who does so to feel they have a good life.

Comparison: The aspirations window

An emerging theme so far in this thesis is the relational nature of wellbeing – it is something greatly influenced by comparison with others – and I have mentioned that aspirations are also shaped partly through comparison. However, with whom do people compare their lives? I have shown how Shaban's aspirations to have children and to own a larger plot of land make sense within the socio-cultural context in which he lives. He forms his aspirations for the future partly by looking at the lives of others around him. In his influential work on aspirations, the economist Debraj Ray (2006) offers the term 'aspirations window' to help us understand how people's aspirations are formed. Ray describes the aspirations window as a person's 'zone of "similar", "attainable" individuals' (p. 1), an idea very similar to what Appadurai refers to as 'a horizon of credible hopes' (2004: 81–2), or Catherine Locke and Dolf te Lintelo term an 'option landscape' (2012: 780). Ray suggests that our aspirations window is comprised primarily of our peers or near-peers, but adds some caveats. Visibility is

important – only those we can see or hear about have a significant impact on our aspirations. In addition, people may observe the activities of their spatial, economic, or social peers and gauge their success, and consequently adjust their aspirations. ‘Looking at the experiences of individuals similar to me’, Ray suggests, ‘is like running an experiment with better controls.’ Finally, Ray tells us of the importance of (perceived) possibilities in terms of social mobility (2006: 2–3).

The terms ‘attainable’ and ‘credible’ are key to understanding the nature of aspirations in Nabikakala and Bukula, and indeed anywhere. While someone such as Shaban may like the idea of a life similar to my own – to have the convenience of a supermarket, or the ability to continue studying or to travel by aeroplane – this is so far removed from his life that it is not seen as attainable or credible. Therefore, I do not form part of his aspirations window. As he says:

I can be here with a plan of wanting to buy [*mailo*] land. Ah-ah [No]. You can only make a plan depending on your current situation. If I make a plan to buy a car, people will just laugh at me. They will say I have become mad.

When Shaban’s aspirations for the future take shape, he is looking primarily at those men in the village of a similar age and perhaps a few years older. Although he has lived in Kampala and Gulu, and has therefore experienced and witnessed many other ways of living, his contemporaries in the village are still the most relevant sources of comparison as they live in a similar context to Shaban, and consequently the opportunities available to him are similar. Most of these men, more so those a little older than Shaban, have a larger area of land to work on, either having been given it by their father or alternatively they have a section of their parents’ land on which to work. Shaban can look at these men and feel that this should be an attainable situation; however, he is at a disadvantage in that his own parents do not live in the village and have subsequently not had land to give him. On the other hand, while some others remain living and working on what remains their parents’ land, Shaban now has land that is his own. As such, when other men compare their own situation with Shaban they can potentially want what he has. Comparison, then, can work in different

directions. Shaban is aware of the importance of this comparison with others. He described himself to me as a *mwavu* (poor person) and I asked him how that makes him feel. He replied, ‘I don’t feel good, but when I look at *bannaku* I feel good’. A *munnakku* (pl. *bannaku*) is a person who is even worse off than a *mwavu*. The term relates to the noun *nnaku* meaning ‘trouble’ or ‘sorrow’. Shaban explained:

A *munnakku* can work just to survive. Today they can get something to eat, but they do not know what will happen tomorrow. If I am a *mwavu* and I see *bannaku* frequently coming to my place to borrow things that means I have to be happy with what I have because it means I have more than at least some people.

For many people, it seems important that they are able to perceive themselves as having a standard of living that is at least as good as the average of those within their aspirations window. The impact of external development agencies no doubt plays a part in shaping aspirations and shifting the parameters of the aspirations window of those in the villages. For example, the provision of water tanks, stoves, and even brick houses to some villagers raises the average standard of living. People use many parameters to judge their status relative to others, and it is a largely intuitive evaluation, particularly as they are comparing across numerous different factors. However, in some ways, perceived quality of life can be quantified and assessed. Below (Table 3-1) are some rough heuristics people in the villages may use to compare their lives with others. Of course there are many more.

	Worse → → → Better			
Livestock	None	Chickens	Goats (pigs)	Cattle
Vehicle	None	Bicycle	Motorbike	Car
Land - type	Ad-hoc renting		Kibanja tenure	Mailo ownership
Land - size	Smaller		Larger	
Home - roof	Thatch		Iron roofing	
Home - walls	Mud		Brick	
Home - floor	Dirt		Cement	
Fuel used	Wood	Charcoal	Kerosene	Solar

Table 3-1: Comparing lives in the villages

Wants and needs

I found an interesting way to think through some of the expectations people have in life, though slightly different from aspirations, was to look at the relationship between things people in the village ‘want’ and those they deem to be ‘needs’. This helps too to show how those things to which people aspire are socially configured. Semantically in Luganda, the difference between wants and needs is quite difficult to parse. The verb *okwagala* is used fairly similarly to the English ‘want’ either expressing an intention (‘I want to go to Nalwewuba’), or a desire for something (‘I want some *matooke*’). However, *okwagala* is also the term used for ‘like’ (and could equally be used to mean ‘would like’). Once or twice, I fell foul of this apparent ambiguity when sitting with people in their compounds. We could be discussing their pineapple garden, for example, and I would express my fondness for the fruit by saying something like ‘*njagala nnyo nnaanaasi*’ (I really like pineapple), only for the person I was visiting to go to their garden and bring one for me, thinking I had said ‘I want a pineapple’. Perhaps this merely reflects my knowledge of the nuances of the language, but it does indicate an overlap between liking and wanting. *Okwagala* also blends in with ‘to need’. Although the verb *okwetaaga* more strictly refers to what, in English, we would call a need, in practice *okwagala* is very often used.

Nonetheless, by paying close attention to how people talk, we can see to what extent different things are considered necessary for living well. While some things are necessary to keep you alive, what we might call basic needs, others are more social needs. The latter would correspond to Maslow’s (1943) ‘esteem’ and ‘love/belonging’ categories of needs. An example will help. On our first day meeting the residents of Nabikakala, Mpagi and I were made tea at the home of 94-year-old Hajji Yakubu. This took some time, requiring the cooking fire to be resuscitated, a kettle of water to be boiled, and a child sent to bring fresh leaves of *mujaaja* (a local herb) for the brew. Having already been given sugar-laden tea at our first home, I asked Mpagi to request that my tea be sugar-free. This provoked some surprise and discussion among the residents of the household. Why would I not want sugar in my tea? Over the course of

my fieldwork, this scene was replayed frequently whenever I declined sugar in my tea.

I would class sugar in my tea as something I may want, rather than something I need. However here sugar is more than that. As Madina told me, ‘Most people here know that it [sugar] is something they need’, and historically the importance of sugar is evident in the request for sugar that Madina’s father made of Brahim. There are parallels here with the history of sugar consumption in the UK. By 1800, Sidney Mintz explains, ‘sugar had become a *necessity* – albeit a costly and rare one – in the diet of every English person’ (1986: 6, emphasis added). Sugar became a social need and a symbol of status. The link with aspirations is the expectation. Madina and others feel that they should be able to have sugar. It is a realistic expectation, and if they are unable to meet this then they feel bad. The need for sugar is evident in hospitality. Being unable to offer a guest sugar in their tea is a source of shame, and my hosts commonly apologised when this was the case. Hospitality is important, and one time I visited Madina she told me, ‘I cannot even offer you tea. *Mpulira bubi* [I feel bad]’. It is similar with aspirations. Aspirations are intricately tied-up with (realistic) expectations, as the different translations of *okusuubira* suggest, and if people feel unable to achieve these, they can feel *bubi* (bad).

It is helpful to think of certain things as social needs, things that people need in order to feel they have an acceptable life. This approach helps us move beyond the unhelpful rigid distinctions between basic needs and social desires. As Karen Tranberg Hansen has argued, these distinctions ‘do not acknowledge the interaction of social and cultural factors’ (2000: 16). Over the course of my fieldwork, various social needs came up in conversation. Reflecting the topic of Hansen’s book, a common example I was given was the need for clothing. Without clothing a person could still live, but for an adult it would be considered socially unacceptable not to dress. Kyango said:

You cannot live without clothes. If I am sitting here at home and do not care about wearing clothes and someone comes asking if I am in, then I can get a shock to the heart, getting scared. If you come to visit me and you find me sitting naked you can run away, just leaving your bike, asking anyone you see on the way, ‘what’s wrong with Muzeeyi Kyango’s head? I found him sitting at home naked’. You might think I am going to eat you.

Other examples include Sowedi explaining that you need a mattress to sleep on rather than simply a mat, my neighbour Isa telling me of the need for a mobile phone, and Moses describing the problems of not having a bicycle. Bicycles, and increasingly now mobile phones, are things that virtually every household has. In Mozambique, Archambault describes how, for her informants, ‘The phone distinguishes those who live (*os que vivem*) from those who merely survive (*dos que só sobrevivem*)’ (2012: 403). It is easy to see how a person can feel bad if the majority of their contemporaries own a bicycle and they are unable to.

One item that has come to be seen as a need for most men in the villages is a *piki-piki* (motorbike) and this is something that those who do not have aspire to. As Shaban said, ‘I have a bicycle, but I need something better. You can get some work, but if it is quite far a bicycle cannot get you there in time, and you reach there when you are already tired’. The lack of this mode of transport hampers Shaban’s ability to find paid building work. Many of the other men make a similar case of needing a *piki-piki* to find paid work. John Kiwanuka, a man in his thirties already with seven children, was able to buy himself a *piki-piki* during my time in the villages. John commonly earned some money by making charcoal and, due to the men having largely exhausted the wood supply in the local area, this necessitated travelling to a nearby sub-county. The price of even a fairly poor *piki-piki* is equivalent to many months’ salary for a teacher such as Mpagi, or of at least two full-grown cattle. John spent six years buying, breeding, and selling goats and cattle in order to save this money. Buying this vehicle was the aim of much of John’s effort for all this time. Seeing him on the day he came back with the bike and in the weeks following, it was obvious he was very proud of his new purchase. Achieving this aspiration put John on a more even footing with most of his peers in the village, and the ability to stand on his own feet rather than rely on friends for lifts was an important aspect of his delight at this purchase.

By looking at social needs, in addition to basic needs, we can see how certain things (a mobile phone, a *piki-piki*, or even sugar) can come to be seen as normal, and that not having one then becomes a deficiency. This may then move it from an

approach goal (something desired to approach a desired outcome) to something more akin to an avoidance goal (something desired to avoid an undesirable outcome).

THE CAPACITY TO PURSUE ASPIRATIONS

I suggest that aspirations have an inherent progression through three closely interlinked stages – there is ideally a process of motivation, progress, and then achievement. Motivation is concerned with the ability to imagine a future and the reasons why such a future would be desirable. Progress relates to the ability to work towards a desired idea or goal and the feeling that its achievement is possible. Finally, achievement concerns the ultimate realisation of the aspiration. If any of these stages is too greatly constrained it can negatively affect wellbeing, although an aspiration may be voluntarily abandoned at any stage.

The previous section has dealt with the motivation aspect of aspiration. We have seen some of the ways in which people's aspirations are shaped and how these aspirations fit in with wider personal and social concerns. Appadurai's (2004) notion of the 'capacity to aspire' provides a link between this and the progress aspect. He argues that the capacity to aspire is a 'navigational capacity' enabling people to effectively perceive and 'map' opportunities and potential routes to their achievement and, in addition, to see how more concrete aspirations connect with those that are more abstract. Appadurai contends that those who are better off have a greater capacity to aspire because they are able to have greater experience of 'experiments with the good life' (p. 68) and are therefore more practised.

Appadurai's analysis helps to show the importance of aspiration and hints at the necessity of these aspirations being seen to be achievable, although he does not discuss this in any depth. When aspirations are believed to be possible this offers *hope*, and as such the process of aspiration itself has intrinsic value. A key message of my thesis is that wellbeing inheres in the ability to pursue a good life, and hope is a crucial aspect of this process. However, Crapanzano warns that hope, as he uses the term, is not

always positive and can lead to inaction, resignation, or passivity (2003: 19). If, as Crapanzano seems to suggest, the realisation of hopes is dependent on the actions of an other, it is likely that hope can lead to inaction. *Okusuubira*, however, does require action, and even when villagers are reliant on the agency of an other, they must nevertheless remain active and engaged in trying to attain their aspirations.

Where the ability to pursue the things we value is thwarted or diminished, hope can fade. In Buganda, the connection between achievability and hope is evident in the dual meaning of the verb *okusuubira* as both ‘to hope’ and ‘to expect’, and when my interlocutors talked about an idea for the future which they expected to fulfil they would use the word *ssuubi*, a noun deriving from the same stem as *okusuubira*. At times, they were quite clear to express that what we were talking about was ‘not just a dream [*kirooto*]’, thereby distinguishing it from something less likely to be achievable.

To help us understand this we can return to the work of Ray who argues that where the ‘aspirations gap’ (that is the gap between current and aspired standards of living) is too great this can lead to an ‘aspirations failure’, and consequently to jealousy and frustration (2006: 4–5). He contends that there must be a ‘chain of *observed, local* steps between the poorest and the richest... [so that]... individuals will not only have aspirations, but will have the sort of aspirations they can act upon’ (2006: 4, emphasis in original). Opportunities to improve life must be seen to exist. William Jankowiak’s (2009) historically informed ethnography of a Chinese city effectively demonstrates this need. He argues that in the period between the early 1980s and 2005, social and political reforms in China allowed people to move from perceiving a lack of choice or control over their lives to feeling that opportunities existed and he notes that optimism and happiness consequently increased. In contrast to this, where aspirations or expectations are unrealistically raised, this can result in existential malaise. Lotte Meinert has noted the ‘moral trap’ of increased access to education in Uganda, where ‘students have come to believe in moralities and competences that are not compatible with their everyday lives, resources, and opportunities’ (2009: 9).

On one hand, this chain of small steps exists in the villages. However, people’s

(pursuits of) aspirations are frequently thwarted by, for example, the weather, market forces, or the actions of others. This is where *embeera ennungi* is important. *Embeera ennungi*, as outlined earlier in the thesis, is essentially about enablement, and having *embeera ennungi* allows you to pursue effectively whichever aspiration or goal you desire or seek. This reflects what Locke and de Lintelo found in their research on the aspirations of young Zambians, that material wealth was not aspired to as an end in itself but as the means to live well (2012: 787). Therefore, while *embeera ennungi* is itself something to aspire to, the achievement of it is also what gives you the capacity to pursue your (further) aspirations.

The process of making progress towards the fulfilment of aspirations is closely tied up with the anticipation of their achievement. Attaining at least some aspirations is clearly important for one's wellbeing, and can be the source of great delight and pride, something which was demonstrably clear when John came home with his new *piki-piki* (cf. Archambault 2015). However, also important, and perhaps of greater everyday significance, are the feelings involved in the pursuit of aspirations. Making progress towards aspirations embodies a hopeful expectation. We saw in the previous chapter how Madina and Matovu enjoyed their work for the anticipation of the benefits it would bring. Shaban too echoes these sentiments, saying that when he is building 'I feel good because I am going to get money'.

However, a person's array of aspirations is dynamic. While some aspirations may be achieved, there will likely always be others as yet unfulfilled, much like a home owner will always have a number of ideas of how to improve their home and the process of 'making' the home may never be complete, as Roy Ellen has shown for Nuaulu houses in Indonesia (1986: 26). As Shaban said, 'You have many goals. When you reach some, you can be happy with those, but then you add more, and when you achieve these you can be happy with these'. Aspiring is a process which may never be complete and so the happiness that comes from the achievement of an aspiration is perhaps not a lasting happiness, as has been pointed out in the literature on 'adaptive preferences' (Elster 1985; Lukes 2005: 134; White 2009: 17) and the 'hedonic

treadmill’ (Auerbach 2012: 349; Kahneman 1999: 13; Layard 2005: 48). Of course, while the happiness deriving from achieving an aspiration may fade, the discontent from not achieving it could be longer lasting. John’s acquisition of the motorbike could quickly come to be seen as normal for him, whereas if he had not been able to buy it he may remain with a perpetual sense of lack while seeing his peers with their motorbikes.

MORALITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Before concluding, I want to address two further aspects of aspirations. Firstly, because aspirations are social they are also a moral issue. Pursuing aspirations is not simply about having the material and social wherewithal to do so. In his work in India, Déné has argued that wellbeing stems ‘from a fit between one’s life and significant social expectations’ rather than between individual aspirations and their achievement (2009: 130). He goes on to say that although ‘well-being arises when one’s life matches one’s wants... [personal] “achievements” that harm others may threaten one’s own well-being’ (p. 142). I have attempted to show in this chapter something similar, in that we cannot understand aspirations as solely individual. A person must take into consideration what other people will think of how they are pursuing their aspirations and how their actions may affect others.

Furthermore, while I focus in this chapter on aspirations, such a discussion ought also to recognise the role of opportunism, contingency, or chance. The course a life takes is not just a perpetual pursuit of aspirations. It is evident that in Shaban’s life many of the major changes that have taken place have been the result not of his active pursuit of aspirations but of external influences or opportunities that have arisen. Shaban would have liked to continue his schooling, but the fact that he was not studying left him free to take up the opportunities to train with the carpenter and then with Steven. His relocation to Kampala and meeting his father gave him the chance to live in a different part of the country. And the NGO coming to Kiti provided him with

an opportunity to learn the trade that is now sustaining him. Shaban's two children could also be said to be the result of chance, as they were certainly not planned. While people will always have some ideas about their future, even if these are unclear, chance and opportunism also play major roles in how a life develops. Aspirations are in constant flux and are shaped partly by circumstances. Charles Larmore tells us that:

The good life is not... the life lived in accord with a rational plan. It is the life lived with a sense of our dual nature as active and passive beings, bent on achieving the goals we espouse, but also liable to be surprised by forms of good we never anticipated. (1999: 111)

Having said this, as we shall see in Chapter 5, nothing in Buganda really happens 'by chance'. Instead, opportunities arise through a mixture of a person's own efforts and *mikisa* (luck or blessings) from God or other spiritual entities.

CONCLUSION

My aim in this chapter has been to demonstrate the role of aspiration in the pursuit of a good life in Nabikakala and Bukula. Aspirations are goals or ideas that people consider ought to be possible for a person in a given set of circumstances and which are defined relative to other people's lives. For someone to be able to feel their life is good, it is important that they feel they are able to pursue their aspirations and to achieve at least some of them. This chapter has been largely concerned with looking at how aspirations are shaped, the competing forces involved in this, and how these aspirations make sense in the context of an individual's history and the socio-cultural context in which they live. It has been essentially a chapter about the 'capacity to aspire'.

We can discern a number of analytical aspects of aspiration. These are laid out in Table 3-2, below, accompanied by an example of each type. Clearly, these variables are not always clear-cut, and there is substantial overlap between different aspects.

Avoidance goals (avoiding infertility)	Remedial goals (regaining good health)	Approach / Positive goals (acquiring larger land)
Specific targets (getting married/finding a partner)		Vague aspirations (increasing wealth)
Private/unshared aspirations (starting a business)		Public/shared aspirations (getting married/finding a partner)
Personal aspirations (becoming more respected)		Collective aspirations (continuing the lineage/clan)
Realisable aspirations (acquiring a motorbike)		(Probably) Unrealistic aspirations (travelling to UK; possibly acquiring <i>mailo</i> land)
Tangible indicators (acquiring land)	Intangible, specific (access to paradise)	Intangible, unspecific (being happy, respected)
Fixed target (buying a bicycle)		Moving target (being wealthier than others)

Table 3-2: Aspects of aspiration

I began the chapter with the proverb, *Asuubira, akira aloota* (One who has hope is better than one who just dreams). Hope is a powerful sentiment allowing people to believe that a better life is possible but, as we have seen, it is important for aspirations to be seen to be achievable. *Embeera ennungi* is important here, but even without this, the successful pursuit of aspirations is possible, through small steps. Nonetheless, aspirations are not always realisable and failures at any of three stages of aspiration – motivation, progress, and achievement – can have a negative impact on wellbeing. Furthermore, it is rare that a person can pursue all their aspirations, and the pursuit of aspirations therefore involves making choices. An aspect of this, the extent to which one pursues more immediate or longer-term aims, is the topic of the next chapter.

Chapter 4 - GRATIFICATION ORIENTATIONS

An itchy jigger is the sweetest treat a poor Ugandan can access
(Sunday Monitor, 13th January 2013: 8)

When an article with the above title appeared in the ‘Comment’ section of one of Uganda’s largest newspapers it surprised me. A jigger (*nvunza*) is a small flea that lives in sand and soil and burrows into the toes and soles of barefoot passers-by. It was a relatively common sight in the village to see someone seated on a mat while a friend or family member poked around their foot with a needle or sharp thorn – the only way to remove the parasite, and something I managed to avoid until my last month in Nabikakala. If not removed, the jigger lays eggs and the infestation expands, making walking progressively more painful. In this piece in the *Sunday Monitor*, the author argued that many of Uganda’s rural poor choose not to remove the jigger because the satisfaction of scratching it is the only pleasure they have in a life so poor that they no longer have any hope. The author went on later in their article to suggest that poor Ugandans should make sure to enjoy feast days, as ‘this is the only happiness they can get’.

This piece suggests that poor Ugandans are limited to making the most of the few short, strictly immediate chances of happiness they can get, even to the extent of retaining a parasite that is detrimental to their long-term health in their bodies just for the instant feeling of pleasure that comes from scratching it. I know myself the guilty pleasure of itching mosquito bites, despite knowing that it will just cause me greater suffering in the coming days. The point raised by the piece is intriguing. Can it be that the rural poor are restricted to more immediate forms of gratification and see any efforts aimed at more distant returns as futile? In my experience there is little basis for such a claim, although I could not tell from the tone of the article whether the writer was being facetious.

The author of this article mentions hope, and this chapter leads directly on from the previous one. Whereas hopes are about how we imagine a future, in this chapter I

deal with one aspect of how those in the villages attempt to achieve these ideas. Deferring gratification necessarily embodies hoping – that denying yourself something in the present will result in greater rewards at a later time. An absence of hope would lead, as the writer suggests, to an orientation towards more immediate gratifications. My aim here, therefore, is to explore patterns of gratification deferral in Nabikakala and Bukula. I do so with a focus on Kaytesi, a woman in her late thirties living in Bukula. We will see Kaytesi's quandaries around if and how to defer gratification in relation to agriculture and children but, as will become clear, what makes Kaytesi particularly interesting for the topic of this chapter are her efforts to secure an afterlife.

WHAT IS GRATIFICATION DEFERRAL?

People everywhere must make decisions about how to live and how best to make use of available resources, both material and nonmaterial. For example, even if a person's material resources are effectively limitless, their time remains finite. We must weigh up the extent to which we defer the rewards of our efforts and so there are, therefore, continual trade-offs between more immediate, hedonic happiness and longer-term gains (Fischer 2014: 44), but also between different types of short- and long-term gains. I want to look in this chapter at some of these trade-offs.

The term 'gratification deferral' is perhaps more familiar in psychology than anthropology. Gratification pertains to the positive emotional rewards resulting from expending some kind of resource. Oxford Dictionaries Online defines it as: 'Pleasure, especially when gained from the satisfaction of a desire' ('Gratification' n.d.). The ability to defer or delay gratification has been dealt with extensively in psychology, with the work of Walter Mischel and his colleagues perhaps the most widely cited (for example Mischel 1958; Mischel, Ebbesen, and Zeiss 1972). Mischel's studies focused on the relative ability of young children to delay consuming a treat – a marshmallow, cookie, or pretzel – to secure a greater reward a short time later. Sigmund Freud also addressed the question of gratification deferral with his 'structural model'. Freud

envisioned three parts of the personality – the id, ego, and super-ego. The id is the unconscious core of personality, based on what he terms the ‘pleasure principle’ and therefore seeks immediate gratification. The super-ego is the moral aspect of the personality, while the ego mediates between the id and external reality, helping to delay gratification for future benefit and therefore meet the needs and wants of the id in the longer term (Carducci 2009: 84–85).

Within anthropology, James Woodburn’s work on delayed- and immediate-return systems is the most prominent relevant research, but the predominant focus on hunter-gatherer societies limits its usefulness here. For Woodburn (1982, 1991), all agricultural societies are, of necessity, primarily delayed-return systems. Nonetheless, a few other anthropologists have looked at gratification deferral in non-hunter-gatherer societies – John Poggie (1978) among fishermen in Puerto Rico, while Richard Thompson (1975), Richard Pollnac and Michael Robbins (1972), and Robbins and Thompson (1974) have looked at the link between modernisation and gratification orientations in Buganda.

There is a tendency for much of the work on gratification orientations to embody an assumption, at least implicitly, that deferral of gratification is preferable. Follow-ups to Mischel’s work in particular have shown that the children from the original experiment who were more inclined to delay were more successful later in life, for example in terms of lower chances of drug addiction (Mischel et al. 2011), and lower body mass index (Schlam et al. 2013). Freud’s work suggests that the id is fully formed at birth and is therefore the natural condition, and that it is only with maturity that individuals develop the capacity to delay gratification. Poggie shows how the ability to delay gratification is ‘adaptive’ for the fishermen in his research, and the studies in Buganda seem to link this ability with greater ‘modernization’, although do not necessarily attach a positive value to this.

However, should we not also consider the benefits of shorter-term gratification? Woodburn argues that societies characterised by immediate-return systems allow people ‘to live reasonably rewarding and satisfying lives’, with decent security, good

health and nutrition, and greater leisure time (1991: 63), and Barth asks, ‘does a relatively contented, irresponsible present provide a higher quality of existence than a life constantly grappling with forethought and ultimate achievements?’ (1999: 97). Finally, Thin warns that schooling should be concerned with pupils’ enjoyment, rather than just being a ‘tax on childhood’ involving suffering in the present for future benefit (2012b: 169). There is a danger to see preferences for immediate gratification as maladaptive, immature, or unmodern if we do not consider that it is possible for these preferences to be conscious decisions. My aim in this chapter is to explore how people in my field site negotiate the deferral of gratification and the questions this raises concerning how to live well. I look at some of the trade-offs Fischer talks about in terms of preferring shorter- or longer-term rewards and examine the benefits and drawbacks of these choices. In his recent concluding article to the *Hau* special issue on happiness, Joel Robbins suggests that a strength of many of the articles in the collection is highlighting that ‘one of the projects that is important to the people they study is finding some way to relate the momentary and the long-term versions of happiness, or to decide how much energy they should devote to seeking each type’ (2015: 218). This chapter in particular contributes a similar analysis from my field site.

In order to analyse gratification deferral more effectively we can discern a number of interrelated factors – it is not simply about postponing a reward from the present to some point in the future. Firstly, deferral may be short- or long-term, maybe even to an afterlife. Secondly, it may be for your own benefit or for the benefit of others, perhaps most commonly your children. Gratification deferral can therefore be a social rather than simply an individual concern. Thirdly, it could be delaying consumption or about value-addition in the form of some kind of investment. Finally, there is a question over the extent of choice in the deferral – whether this is chosen or compelled, either by resource availability or by social expectations. I will refer to each of these distinctions in the ethnographic examples that follow; however, I will return to discuss the latter, the link between choice and constraint, at the end of the chapter.

The discussion of gratification deferral has so far been fairly abstract, so in order

to concretise it I turn now to Kayteshi. Following a brief biography, I take Kayteshi as a starting point to examine gratification deferral in three domains of village life: agriculture, the raising of her children, and the importance of her religious beliefs and views on the afterlife. I then go on to discuss predilections for more immediate gratification and the potential benefits of this. I tie up the chapter by looking at the link between choice and constraint referred to above.

KAYTESHI

Kayteshi Loranse lives at the highest point in Bukula, looking out from the ridge down to the flat land of swamps, bushland, and cattle farms not far below. I loved our visits to Kayteshi's home for this view stretching for miles. Kayteshi is in her late thirties and lives in a well-built brick house with iron sheet roofing, plastered walls and cement floors, and a small solar panel that powers two lights when darkness descends. She grew up in rural Rwanda with five sisters and one brother, although two other brothers died while still young. Her siblings and parents all remain in Rwanda and she tries to visit every couple of years. Kayteshi completed primary school and then joined a technical school to train in tailoring. However, soon after beginning her training, she met and married her current husband, Kaloli. Kaloli already had one wife, Mary. When I asked Kayteshi how she had met Kaloli, she first replied, 'I don't know', and then that she did not want to explain.

Not long after this, when Kayteshi was around fifteen, they moved to Uganda. This would have coincided with the build-up to and the beginning of the 1990-94 civil war in Rwanda, although Kayteshi did not talk about this. An aunt of Kaloli who had already emigrated came to visit and suggested to him that he move to Uganda where more land was available than in Rwanda. He agreed and returned to Uganda with his aunt and both wives. I asked Kayteshi whether she found it difficult leaving Rwanda and her family. She simply replied that 'daughters usually go away when they marry' and noted too that both Kaloli's parents had died so he had less holding him in Rwanda.

Despite nearly 25 years away from Rwanda, she remains firmly Rwandan, and ensures that her children know they are Banyarwanda too. She said she does not really understand why there has been so much fighting in her country: ‘In Rwanda we all speak one language, so we are all one *ggwanga* [tribe/nationality]’. She speaks Luganda and Lunyarwanda fluently, but the language spoken in the home is always Lunyarwanda. Despite her strong feelings towards her home country she says, ‘I am happy here. There is no reason to leave. Rwanda still feels like my real home, but I have my children here so I don’t think about it’.



Figure 4-1: The view looking out from close to Kaytesi’s house

When they arrived in the area, they initially stayed with Kaloli’s aunt, before getting their own small piece of land in Lugalama. I am unsure whether during this period Kaytesi and Mary lived together. In time however, Kaloli acquired the plot on which Kaytesi now lives. Mary lives farther down the ridge, about a ten-minute walk away. Kaloli splits his time between the two, and the two women have very little interaction with one another. When I asked Kaytesi whether they are on a *kibanja* plot

or actually own the land, she laughed and explained that getting a land title (*mailo* land) is very difficult, and particularly so for non-Baganda (reflecting Elliott Green's (2006) findings concerning the reluctance of many Baganda to sell their land to 'foreigners').

Kaytesi told me that although they now have seven children, she and Kaloli 'took a long time before producing [*okuzaala*]. We wanted, but it did not happen'. It was almost ten years before she had her first child, but she explained that during this period she always expected that she would have children, that she knew she just had to wait until God gave her one, and that she did not worry that Kaloli would find himself another wife.

Kaytesi's daily life involves a mixture of domestic tasks, taking care of the children, working in the garden, and looking after her cattle and goats. She told me:

The only way I can make money now is through digging [*okulima*], and keeping animals [*okuhunda*]. I learned how to make clothing for children, but I can't anymore – I have forgotten. I only dig for myself, never being paid to dig for someone else. It is impossible to make a budget or a plan. We just spend when we have. My husband and I keep our own money that we have made. I largely take care of the children, but he is the one who pays the school fees, although I sometimes contribute some of it. But I think it is good for a couple to put their money together.

It was impossible to converse for long with Kaytesi without the discussion turning to God. She and Kaloli both grew up in Catholic families but became Jehovah's Witnesses after getting married. As a Jehovah's Witness, it is a core requirement of Kaytesi's faith to proselytise.⁷ However, rather than being sententious, Kaytesi just comes across as someone who believes wholeheartedly in something and is keen to share what she knows. Her faith is central to her life, and she travels the thirteen kilometres to Lukaya almost every week to attend the meetings at the Kingdom Hall. It is evident that her faith is a crucial determinant in how Kaytesi chooses to live her life, and the desire to be resurrected on Judgement Day and be part of *ensi empya* (a new world ruled from heaven by God's Kingdom) influences how she lives in the

⁷ Any references I make to Jehovah's Witnesses' beliefs are those of Kaytesi, rather than from official publications, unless otherwise stated.

present. I will return in due course to consider further the importance of Kayteshi's religious beliefs in relation to gratification deferral. First, however, I want to look at agriculture.

AGRICULTURE

Okulya eggī – kwesubya miwula
Eating an egg is giving up on chicken
(Kizza 2010: 74)

I want to begin this section with a variation of the question of the chicken and the egg. Is it preferable to eat an egg your hen has laid or to wait and allow it to hatch and grow into an adult chicken? In doing the latter, you are taking a risk over whether the egg will hatch, and that the chick will survive disease, the constant threat of the *kamunye* (hawk), and potentially even of theft. Electing for the former at least guarantees an immediate source of excellent nutrition and something of a treat for many, but precludes any chance of further gains in the future – a fully-grown chicken can be sold, eaten, or used to produce more eggs. The other question then is, if you have an adult hen, is it preferable to eat it or keep it to produce eggs and potentially more chickens? With a rooster, the dilemma is slightly simplified but a big dominant cockerel can be valuable in the compound or for sale due to its reproductive potential. The questions this example raises mirror ones villagers face throughout everyday life. Deferral often involves risk but contains the potential for greater future rewards. This is particularly evident in the agricultural sphere, by its very nature an exercise in delaying gratification (Woodburn 1982: 433).

When I asked Kayteshi about her agricultural plans, she explained that she usually only makes plans for the coming season, setting aside some of the seeds from the harvest to be planted when the rains of the subsequent season begin. At times, this can be a struggle because reserving the maize, beans, or groundnuts means they cannot be eaten and therefore, when supplies run low, Kayteshi needs to make decisions over whether or not to eat these saved seeds. She told me:

If I have harvested, the reason I decide to make plans for one season is because I do not get much from a season, so it is difficult to make long plans. But I try, maybe by buying a young bull and then selling it when it is older and so can make longer-term plans from that sale.

As she mentions here, one way Kayteshi can attempt to make slightly longer-term plans is through investing in livestock. She and Kaloli have six or seven cattle, and she also tends to keep a few goats. If she buys these when they are young, she can rear them and either sell them when fully grown, or keep them for breeding:

If you get maybe 50,000 shillings you can get something nice to eat and make the family happy, but it is better to buy a small goat for example. With that small goat, if it does not fall sick then it can produce. If you fall in some problems then you can sell that baby.

For example, for a number of months towards the end of 2013, Kayteshi kept telling me she was hoping to go to Rwanda with the children to visit family. She had been hoping to make some extra money from her crops but, given the poor season, this turned out to be impossible. In the end, around the turn of the year, she sold a number of her goats in order to raise the money to travel, but was only able to go alone. So, while in some ways she is constrained in her capacity to defer rewards, Kayteshi nevertheless is at least able to attempt to do so through other means. Livestock is both a way of ‘holding’ resources and of potential value addition. Whereas cash may be easier to fritter away, exchanging it for a goat keeps the value in a kind of ‘bank’. Interestingly, I found no form of savings or investment groups in the villages like those that have sprung up in many other parts of Africa (for example Benda 2012; Kimuyu 1999; Tripp 1994). Around the turn of the century, Kyango did form a community organisation with the intention of pooling resources to invest in agriculture, such as in shared equipment. At first, many people joined but, he said, when they failed to see quick returns people began pulling out. Now, the membership is just him.

As I suggested at the outset of this section, investing in livestock is inherently risky, and the potential rewards are countered by potentially devastating costs. Especially for those for whom one or two animals represent a major expenditure, the loss of an animal can prove distressing. Animals fall sick and treating them effectively

can be prohibitively expensive. Every so often, news passes round the village that ‘so-and-so’s cow has died. He is really upset’. This cow may represent the majority of a person’s wealth, and embody many of their hopes for the future, so when the cow dies plans are thrown awry. Livestock can also be particularly susceptible to theft as the animals are typically kept outdoors. During my fieldwork there were stories of chickens going missing, the Ziwa family had their cow stolen, and Mpagi had first one of his goats stolen and then a few days later the remaining six. At first, he suggested that the initial theft was potentially for some ceremony with a *musawo muganda* (local healer), ‘because it had colouring they often like’. Perhaps the thief came back for the others after realising how easy it was the first time. This event wiped-out Mpagi’s ‘savings’ during a time in which he was already struggling following the poor growing season.



Figure 4-2: Kaytesi with one of her goats

Nonetheless, despite these hazards, people persist with buying livestock as a means of building for the future. Mpagi surprised me one day while we were having a

beer at Nalwewuba, when he told me he was keen to buy a cow that a neighbour was looking to sell. I expressed my surprise that he had the money needed when only a month earlier he had been complaining about not having enough money to buy meat for the family for Easter. He said it had taken him two years to save up the money to be able to afford a young cow. Similarly, we saw in the last chapter John Kiwanuka's efforts over six years of keeping and breeding livestock in order to purchase his motorbike. We can see here an example of the trade-offs that individuals make when deciding how best to utilise their finite resources, and the ways they can partition resources into separate 'accounts' for different purposes.

We saw in Chapter 2 that, like keeping livestock, growing crops is uncertain, subject to the vagaries of, among other things, the weather, seed quality, and hungry cattle. For most families in the villages, it is not something they can choose to do or not do; without growing crops, they do not eat. Nonetheless, some individuals do choose not to grow their own crops, preferring instead to work for others. One such individual was Kajjubi, Mpagi's nephew. Kajjubi is in his early twenties and lives just a stone's throw from his uncle's house in a very small thatched hut. He spends much of his time chatting with friends or doing very casual labour such as fetching water or doing a little digging in others' gardens. Very often, he is paid with a meal rather than money, and frequently when he does receive money, he takes it to spend in the disco at Nalwewuba. Shaban, a close relative of Kajjubi, said, 'He does not think far. His plans are short. He can get 5k [shillings] and then instead of continuing working he just spends it'.⁸ Moses interjected, 'When he has 5k he can call himself a *mugagga* [rich person]'. I asked then whether this meant it was easier for Kajjubi to be happy than for others and Moses replied, 'Yes, he is happy', with Shaban agreeing, 'He is happy with his *embeera*'. However, Shaban went on to say this is not good because:

He has not looked at how his *embeera* will be in the future... only looking at today. He can go to Gomba to make charcoal and come back with 40k [shillings]. But he can't buy trousers or a shirt; it just goes on alcohol. That is

⁸ Kajjubi's and Shaban's grandfathers were brothers.

embeera embi nnyo [a very bad life].

Having said this, whilst some bemoan the apparently increasing tendencies of others towards these forms of immediate gratification or of a lack of foresight, it is sometimes recognised that young men like Kajjubi may actually have a more sensible approach. During my second agricultural season on fieldwork, while most were worrying about the effects the poor weather conditions would have on their crops, Mpagi told me that Kajjubi was laughing at them all. He had spent the season helping people on an ad-hoc basis, getting just enough to live, and was relaxing and enjoying himself while others were toiling in the fields. Now everyone else was in virtually the same position as him, having almost no crops despite having invested huge amounts of effort. This returns us to the notion of risk. Rather than defer gratification by using his resources to invest in agriculture with the consequent risk this involves, Kajjubi had found himself in a similar situation to others but without the disappointment of a poor season and hours of wasted effort. However, by doing so he could never increase his rewards, whereas others retain the hope of doing so when their crops are ready to harvest. A thought experiment posed by one of my interlocutors helps us further explore this question.

I was talking about the notion of success (*buwanguzi*) with Ivan, a young man whom I met fairly late on in my fieldwork after he returned to Bukula from some years in Kampala. Ivan tried to explain ‘success’ by offering this scenario, although it serves also to help us think about risk in relation to gratification deferral.

Imagine you have two girls, and you give each one a cup of beans, telling them you want it back in four months. One girl keeps the beans, and remains happy, knowing that she will be able to give you it back after the four months. The other goes and plants her beans, and is then able to give you back your beans, and keep lots for herself. Who is the successful one?

This precipitated a long, involved debate. Let us call the two girls Nakato (who keeps the beans) and Babirye (who plants them).⁹ Is Nakato able to be surer of returning the beans because she has no crops to be destroyed by animals or poor weather? Or is she

⁹ Babirye and Nakato are the two names always given to female twins in Buganda.

in fact leaving herself open to greater risk because her cup of beans may be accidentally eaten or stolen? Does Babirye therefore have the better plan because her beans (her resources) are tied up in something (a little like Kaytesí's goat) and cannot be eaten or taken? Who has more scope for happiness? Assuming her cup of beans is safe, Nakato can relax for four months knowing that she will be able to return it. Babirye on the other hand will potentially be able to return one cup and benefit from an abundance of her own beans. Alternatively, she may invest time and effort to achieve very little. Does she then just feel disappointment?

We can see from this discussion that in the day-to-day concern of making a living villagers face continual questions about how best to use resources, particularly during tough periods such as a poor agricultural season. In relation to the schema of different aspects of gratification deferral that I laid out in the introduction, most prominent in this section has been whether to use something in the present (an egg, seeds, or 40k shillings from making charcoal) or to keep it in order to add value, the latter being potentially risky but possibly much more rewarding. Additionally, much of this discussion relates to the issue of choice and constraint. While people like Kaytesí have some constraints on their ability to defer and to make long-term plans, they nevertheless do have some scope for choice.

CHILDREN

*The things I do, they can help me while I am still alive,
or help my children if I die*
(Kaytesí, December 2013)

The second area I want to look at in relation to gratification deferral is children. Having children is a way of investing in your own future, but also permits transferring rewards onto someone else. Kaytesí's children are of obvious importance to her. She has a strong bond with them, playing with them often, being very tactile, and they clearly value being close to her. Being able to give her children a good start in life is important to her. However, she does not feel that she currently has sufficient resources to look

after her children in the way she would like, and she suggested that having fewer children is perhaps more sensible: ‘Things are not going on as I would like... as I would hope. But I am still trying, so I have not yet failed’. She explained that while she is very happy with having seven children, if she were able to go back in time, knowing how her life would be today, then she would prefer to have two or three children only. This shows the complication of gratification deferral, and the difficulty in knowing what is the best course of action. Kaytesi rationalises that having fewer children would allow her to provide for them better, but at the same time does not regret having more than this.

For many, having children could be seen as a deferral of gratification until old age. We saw in the previous chapter the importance of children for care, but there seems to be a common belief in the villages that having *more* children enhances the chances of them being able to care for you in old age, something that I will go on to discuss in greater depth in the next chapter. When I suggested this to Kaytesi, she told me that she does not think like this, instead saying that it is important to ensure that your children can grow up well. The most important thing Kaytesi believes a parent can do for their children is to educate them, through school but also in agriculture and in her religion. She said:

In the past, people produced many children because they did not have the aim of educating their children. They just farmed, and so long as food was enough that was fine. But these days, land is not enough. Even for people who want to dig, there is little space; so it is better if you educate your children and they can find their own ways to make money.

Many in the village share this sentiment. For most, being able to give their children a good education, ideally by sending them to school in Lukaya or even farther afield, entails hard work and some constraint on their own expenditure. Many cannot afford to do so. In an early meeting with the Bukula village (LC1) chairman, Lukanika, he expressed to me that ‘if I go a day without eating in order to pay school fees then that is okay’. However, electing to invest in your children can backfire if they do not succeed and therefore offer you little in old age.

An example of the success of such an approach is the Ziwa family. As Madina explained, their status as one of the closest in the area to having *embeera ennungi* was largely the result of the emphasis the parents put on educating their children:

All the children are educated, and now they [the parents] can benefit from it. For him [Ziwa], he does not dig. If they need something, like sugar, or whatever, they can call to town and ask them to bring it. They have a very nice house, built by the children.

Despite having more than twenty children, Ziwa ensured that the majority were able to complete high school and many went on to some form of further education. All have now left the village, with most living in Kampala, and a number have well-paying jobs. This has created a security for the parents in the village and ensured they are able to live in relative comfort compared to most others in the villages. Their house is one of the largest and most well-constructed in the area, and shortly after I completed my fieldwork the offspring managed to install a solar power system in the home – something I did not see anywhere nearby, excepting a few small panels for powering one or two lights, like the one in Kaytesa's home. Ziwa was terminally ill during my research, and in fact passed away a number of months after I returned to Scotland. However, throughout his illness the family were able to pay relatively large sums of money on treatment and care – something that would be beyond the resources of others in the area.

Kobusingye told me a number of times the story of their arrival in the village and the subsequent years of struggle. Ziwa had received a good education and worked for a succession of government administrations. Therefore, when he retired and they moved to Nabikakala around thirty years ago, he was able to purchase a large area of *mailo* land. Nonetheless, this is not to say that the family had substantial wealth with which to continue to educate their growing family. Initially the family lived at the home of a neighbour, Hajji Yakubu, before they managed to construct their first house on their land, although the poor quality of this house left Ziwa a laughing stock in the villages, and he retained until his death the nickname *bitoogo* after the house's papyrus roof. In these early years especially, they toiled hard to be able to pay school fees for

the children.

Kobusingye told me once that she hoped they were able to provide an example to others about the importance of working hard to give children an education. In fact, I was never quite able to gauge the feelings of other villagers towards the Ziwa family. It seemed to be a mixture of jealousy and respect, although of course my discussions were always affected by my close relationship with the family. There was a respect for how Ziwa had managed to educate his children and he was now seen to be reaping the benefits of this (as Shaban put it, '*akungula*' (he is harvesting)). However, at the same time undoubtedly, many could see it as unfair that the Ziwas could achieve this while they struggled on. Shaban's comments illustrate the difference between Ziwa and many others in the village: 'Muzeeyi Ziwa grew up educated, and so knew the value of education. So many families here do not see the value'. However, he continued, 'But Muzeeyi Ziwa had enough money. He was an ambassador; he was able to come here and buy that big land. How could a poor person do that?'

What this suggests is the importance of having the *ability* to make longer-term plans, to defer at least some gratification until later in life. Largely, this depends on resources – on money, on education, or on a good inheritance in terms of land for example. Not having this head start does not preclude you from maintaining a longer-term approach to gratification deferral, but does make it more difficult.

We can see in this discussion the importance of deferring rewards to later in life, through the hoped-for gains brought by successful children. At the same time, the deferral is not simply an individual or personal deferral, but a deferral to the next generation. Investing in children, and likely foregoing more immediate rewards to do so, benefits both you and them in the future. Finally, the link between choice and constraint is again in evidence as the ability to invest in the future through your children depends heavily on your *embeera*. Returning to Kaytesi, she sees the head start she can give her children as more related to their faith: 'For Jehovah's Witnesses, inheritance [*busika*] is not such an important thing. The important thing is to do the work of God. If your child does not do the work of God, what have they inherited?'

RELIGION

On one occasion, Moses and I were discussing with Kaytesi the concept of success. As with the majority of our discussions, we were in the family's front reception room, with the floor covered in beautifully made, durable reed mats. The room had a wooden bench and a small table frequently strewn with editions of *The Watchtower* and other Jehovah's Witnesses literature in both English and Luganda. I was the only one who would sometimes choose to sit on the bench, while Kaytesi would sit near the front door trying various bits and pieces in the door jamb to stop the creak caused by the breeze. When I first asked her to explain success she said it was to win, for example at a football match, and indeed in Luganda the same word, *okuwangula*, is used for 'to win' and 'to succeed'. Moses pressed her, asking whether it was possible to look at someone's life and say they have succeeded. He gave the example of Muzeeyi Ziwa: 'He is there, he is old, but he does not need to work. His children help him with everything. Can you not say he has succeeded?' Kaytesi's response was informative:

That is wealth. The thing about wealth is that it is wealth in this world. I cannot say that someone who has achieved wealth in this world has achieved success, because wealth in this world is just for a short time. It does not matter how much you have. It is like the president. I cannot say he has succeeded because it is worldly wealth.

Knowing from previous discussions about her strong faith, I asked, though displaying a naivety, 'So does success for you only mean that you have reached heaven? Is that success?' She replied:

{Kaytesi} Ha ha, I am going to stay on the earth Stephen. The Bible says we are going to stay in *ensi empya* [literally 'the new world']. There will be no sickness, no war, no law breaking. On this world, not heaven.¹⁰

{Stephen} Okay, so not heaven, but is that success? You have lived your life well and God allows you into *ensi empya*?

{K} Yes. There is no sickness, no war, no law-breaking, no one beating others. No bad things are there. People will have *embeera ennungi*.

¹⁰ According to Jehovah's Witnesses literature, God's Kingdom, comprising Jesus alongside a 'little flock' of 144,000 people, will rule from heaven and bring about the new world, or a global paradise (JW.org 2013).

She went on to describe more about *ensi empya*, explaining that ‘it is here exactly, but without bad things’. There will be no pain, nor death, nor will anyone grow old. People will have to work, but not so hard, and trees will bear much fruit and crops will thrive. There will be household chores and children to look after, although this will not take so long and people will have more free time, in which they will visit friends, worship, and pray. Moses and I agreed that it sounds good and asked her how one gets there.

{K} People who read the Bible and who agree with what is written there, then they will be in *ensi empya*.

{S} So it is not so important how your life is now? It doesn’t matter if you are poor, or how your *embeera* or *obulamu* is, because it is just for a short time? What matters is just serving God well?

{K} Yes. Wealth is not really in my heart. I am not going to refuse to work, because I need to get something to eat, something to wear – to get a decent *embeera*. But the important thing is to learn [about God].

We may ask whether Kaytesi’s desire to reach *ensi empya* is really a deferral of gratification because ‘deferral’ implies foregoing something in the present. Proselytising is a key facet of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ faith and this necessarily takes up some of her time – time in which she could potentially be working. She explained that this is ‘my responsibility. You have to spread the good news in the whole world’. However, Kaytesi did not seem to see this as a chore and in fact appeared to enjoy telling others about Jehovah. I frequently found her at Mpagi’s home engaged in Bible study with his wife (who is Protestant) and various Jehovah’s Witnesses paraphernalia. When she speaks about her faith, she speaks enthusiastically and passionately and obviously takes great pleasure in teaching others about God. And she does so in a very genial manner. It is impossible not to be impressed with her enthusiasm and the fact that what she is explaining to you she absolutely knows to be the truth. She told me that if she were able to she would spend more time teaching others about God. I once asked her what she would do if she achieved a life in which she had enough money and no longer needed to work, to which she replied, ‘If I reached that kind of life, I could not just sit around. I would travel around all over the place telling people about God’.

There is a conflation of gratification orientations in evidence here. Proselytising is, for Kaytesi, both immediate and delayed gratification and in this way is similar to the pleasure villagers can take from their work in the fields that I have talked about earlier. Hard work is necessarily a deferral of gratification until the harvest, but while engaged in ‘digging’, people can take immediate anticipatory pleasure in knowing they are being productive. Through proselytising, Kaytesi is deferring the potential medium-term rewards from productive work such as agriculture to later, after-life, rewards. In addition, this example relates to the question of choice and constraint. Kaytesi *chooses* to devote some of her time to proselytising but at the same time this is a requirement of her faith, so is also something she has to do.

The issue of motivation links to an interesting difference in the afterlife beliefs of Jehovah’s Witnesses compared to those of Christians or Muslims – the lack of a concept akin to hell (or *jahannam* in Islam).¹¹ Instead, after death, adherents are buried until the day of judgement, upon which they will be resurrected. For those not deemed worthy of resurrection to *ensi empya* they will simply remain dead (JW.org 2014). Therefore, while Christians and Muslims have combined motivations to achieve entry to heaven or *jannah* (an approach goal) as well as to avoid hell or *jahannam* (an avoidance goal), the impetus for a Jehovah’s Witness such as Kaytesi is more the desire for the new world. (Although, having said this it could also be argued that the ‘nothingness’ of not being resurrected could also be frightening.) I pointed out this striking difference during one of our conversations, prompting an exchange between Kaytesi and Moses.

{K} The honest, loving, just God, how can he put someone on fire for ever?

{Moses} They are going to be burned depending on what they do. He can still be just. Hell is the punishment for not obeying him.

{K} Do you really expect God can do something like that?

{Stephen} Like Moses said [earlier in the discussion], sometimes people go to the mosque or the church because of fear. They are scared what will happen if they do not. For Jehovah’s Witnesses, the only motivation is because you want

¹¹ A fuller discussion on afterlife beliefs in the village will follow in Chapter 6.

something.

{K} Yes. We serve him because we want him to make *ensi empya*... because we want happiness [*ssanyu*]... because he is going to get rid of anything bad. It is not because we fear him, like others may. Fearing him because he kills people...¹²

{M} I think I am going to change my religion...

Kaytesi's views on what happens after death highlight a key question that people in Nabikakala and Bukula face in how they live their life – to what extent should you live life with what comes after in mind? Of course, this is not necessarily a conscious decision, and it may have varying levels of impact on how you live your life, but there is nevertheless an underlying assumption about what the afterlife will bring. To someone who does not believe in any afterlife there is no individual reason to defer gratification until after death. However, for the large numbers of people the world over who, like Kaytesi, do believe in some form of afterlife, very often this influences the way in which they live in the present. One manifestation of this is asceticism.

Asceticism

While Kaytesi's efforts to gain access to *ensi empya* may not be a straightforward deferral of gratification, since she enjoys the activities it involves, there are more obvious examples in the villages of foregoing of present pleasures for future benefit in terms of religion, what we might call ascetic practices. Oxford Dictionaries Online defines ascetic as: 'Characterized by severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons' ('Ascetic' n.d.). Asceticism entails a selective denial of something or certain things in the expectation that doing so will yield greater profits in the future, typically in terms of spiritual benefits, such as passage into a desirable afterlife. There are various ascetic practices in evidence in the villages, most notably fasting for Ramadan or, for a few people such as Kobusingye, for Lent. Other denials include abstinence from alcohol or from pork for

¹² Happiness figures prominently in official Jehovah's Witnesses literature. A search for 'happiness' on JW.org gives almost 900 results.

Muslims. Whether or not these latter practices can be considered ascetic is debatable as they are not necessarily denials of something desirable. For Muslims like Moses, Madina, and Shaban, the idea of consuming pork or alcohol is abhorrent, while Ramadan in contrast is a challenging undertaking.

However, while doctrinally Ramadan is a form of asceticism, many do not necessarily fully subscribe to it. Of the Muslims I knew in the villages, I did not see any breaking the fast early. However, as Shaban explained:

Many people say they have fasted, but then back at home they will eat. One time I saw in the newspaper a man going for ablution, but a *kindazi* [small cake] fell from his pocket. It said, 'here is a man who fears other people, but he does not fear God'.

Nonetheless, other than these examples, asceticism is not particularly in evidence. I commonly asked my interlocutors their opinions on religious asceticism, explaining to them about Christian monks' abstinences in the name of better serving God. In general, they either disapproved or failed to understand why anyone would act in this way. When I explained that it was similar to Catholic priests' vows of celibacy, many simply exclaimed that priests are very often not good at keeping this and Shaban said that some even have children. When we discussed monks with Kaytesi, she argued that a life of silence, prayer, and study is not good because 'they cannot tell others about God'.

Even so, villagers do, at least on the surface, do things in order to secure an afterlife. Large numbers will attend the mosque or a church, if not weekly then at least on special days such as Easter, Christmas, or Eid. However, while this may be seen by some as something of an inconvenience, it could be argued that it is not quite a deferral of gratification to an afterlife. Instead, giving up your time to go to a service, rather than spending it in a more immediately productive or enjoyable manner, can have more immediate benefits. I was often told how, for some, going to church or the mosque is more about being seen there by others than about praising God:

You know, people go to church... it is just to show a picture to the other people, that these are good people... A church is something just for people to hide, during the day.

(Mpagi, February 2014)

This suggests that these people are perhaps more concerned with shorter-term benefits than securing a favourable afterlife, but at the same time represents a deferral of gratification because they are attempting to ensure conducive social relations.

We can thus see, again, the tensions between shorter- and longer-term gratification deferral. People desire the benefits that come from their faith, such as entry to heaven or *jannah* but, at the same time, they are tempted by more immediate rewards, such as a *kindazi*. In the next section, I want to take a closer look at the tendency to pursue immediate gratifications.

IMMEDIATE GRATIFICATION

Until now, my discussion has been more concerned with various forms of delaying gratification, but I want to turn now to discuss the value of more immediate gratification. When I talked to people in the villages, most stated a preference for more deferred gratification, for planning well for the future, much as Kaytesa did. However, this ideal is not always revealed in their behaviour. Sometimes, for instance, people choose to spend 10k shillings on meat for the family, or on socialising at Maama John's bar, rather than saving it to invest in livestock. Does this mean that in these cases what people do reveals what they *really* want? No, for as Fischer says:

[People] also really want what they say they want, and this reveals a great deal about their ideals and values, the sort of person they imagine themselves to be and the sort of world they would like to live in. Such aspirational values orient our long-term goals, and yet we often also succumb to short-term gratification at the expense of longer-term. (2014: 45)

It could be tempting then to see this gap between stated and revealed preferences as a failure or as an example of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957), that people are 'succumbing' to present-term temptations rather than pursuing their longer-term goals. However, I argue, we should also recognise that these more immediate rewards are valuable too.

While the examples above may, on the face of it, be activities at the expense of future rewards, there may also be longer-term benefits deriving from them. Eating meat may be a pleasurable treat but, as John Kiwanuka explained, it makes the family happy and helps keep him strong and therefore able to work harder. In addition, when he feels happy he can work more. Socialising and social consumption of alcohol can also have lasting rewards deriving from the relationships they help foster.

Of course, immediate gratification has more inherent benefits too – the positive emotions it engenders. An interesting comparison is Joost Beuving's (2010) research at a fish landing site on the shores of Lake Victoria, not far from Masaka town. Beuving argues that while the young men who migrate to this community come looking for opportunities to make money from the Nile perch industry, they subsequently discover that success in the industry is difficult. They nevertheless stay because they enjoy the lifestyle in the community, free from kinship ties and obligations and able to enjoy the 'leisure industry' of bars, dance halls, and pool tables that has arisen in the landing site.

A similar lifestyle seems to be followed by some of the young people in the villages, such as we saw with Kajjubi, earning just enough money to afford to go to the disco and bars at Nalwewuba. Mpagi told me that when the disco was built a few years ago the owners originally hoped to construct it in Bukula but this plan was vetoed by the Bukula LC1 committee. He explained that the young people, men in particular, of Lugalama (of which Nalwewuba is part) have since become lazier and more unscrupulous. The temptations of the disco, he feels, have changed their character and he feels vindicated that the Bukula committee refused the development within their own village boundaries.

This echoes a discussion we had with Kaytesa when I asked her about her thoughts on the mantra some people in the UK purport to live by of 'living every day as if it is your last', since you cannot know what is happening tomorrow. She said that it is true that you cannot know if you will be here tomorrow, but 'you cannot just act for today without thinking about tomorrow because you cannot know that your life

will be over tomorrow. People have to plan for the future'. Kayteshi also told me that drinking alcohol cannot bring 'real', enduring happiness: 'there is no happiness from drinking', thereby reflecting her comments about the lack of enduring benefits deriving from worldly wealth. In a very similar vein, Mpagi and his wife, Nalukwago, when I asked them whether someone can be happy from drinking said, 'He can, for that brief time. But this is ignorance... This man is happy for that brief time but nothing more'.

CHOICE AND CONSTRAINT

At the heart of the discussion in this chapter is the nexus between choice and constraint. While deferral implies a choice to delay rewards (or not), I have also looked at the constraints on this choice. Often, more immediate gratification is a result of these constraints. I want to turn now to look a little more closely at this relationship with two examples.

One example that highlights the tensions between choice and constraint is the local charcoal industry. A large number of men in the villages are involved in this business. Of these men, the one I knew best was John Kiwanuka, a man in his early thirties with seven children. He took me one day to the area where they were working, in the plains immediately below Kayteshi's house. Lukanika, the Bukula LC1 chairman, organised the industry, paying some itinerant workers to hack down the bush into usable sections of wood. Men such as John, working on their own, collected this wood and piled it into mounds, which were then covered with earth for burning. Lukanika would then buy the charcoal from John and take it to Lukaya to sell.

Villagers were largely aware that this industry was not sustainable in the long-term and, indeed, later on in my fieldwork, the men had exhausted the wood available in this area and many were now working away in the neighbouring district where Lukanika had bought some trees. Many villagers complained about the difficulty of finding firewood, the principle fuel for cooking, and some were forced to buy wood from neighbours. In addition, various individuals explained to me that deforestation

was a cause of the disruption to the weather patterns they had been seeing in recent years.

It is not a case simply of wealthy businesses pillaging the natural resources of the area. The men involved in the industry are some of those complaining of the consequences. Nevertheless, the immediate financial benefits from charcoal production are tempting. Getting involved in the industry is a choice, but when opportunities to earn money in the village are somewhat limited, and in particular when agriculture is proving unproductive, the necessity to make a living can lead to short-term gains at the expense of the future.

A second example comes from one of the projects run by Codewe, the small non-governmental organisation led by members of the Ziwa family. In theory, the project was straightforward. Codewe gave a female piglet to a number of villagers with the intention that the organisation would be 'repaid' with half the first farrow from each pig, upon which they would then be able to distribute these to more villagers. The recipients would benefit from receiving an animal that, as it breeds, would bring them a source of income or a way of saving (were they to keep the resulting offspring). However, the project never really took off beyond the first distribution of piglets. One of the problems was that some recipients did not keep the pig long enough to allow it to breed, instead choosing to sell it. In one case, Kobusingye explained, the recipient had told her that they were unable to return any piglets because they had encountered some problems and had been forced to sell the pig to raise money. Shortly after this, word came to Kobusingye that this family had bought new sofas for their front room. Instead of seeing the pig as an asset that would allow them to make more money in the future, it appeared that they had simply taken the opportunity to buy something nice.

This example again illustrates an aspect of the relationship between choice and constraint. Receiving an animal allowed these people to get an immediate reward without any investment. Keeping the piglet would have potentially required a struggle to keep it fed and healthy and they would run the risk of it dying or being stolen. At the same time, the family could see this as an opportunity to enhance their social status

with the acquisition of new furniture, linking to the pressures of attempting to pursue socially valued aspirations.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have attempted to elucidate some of the questions residents of Nabikakala and Bukula face in deciding where in time to orient their efforts. At the outset, I laid out a schema to help examine these questions and I want to return briefly to this now, with the intervening discussion in mind. The first consideration is the length of deferral, and I have discussed variations in this from pursuing immediate gratification, to making medium-term plans for the coming agricultural season, all the way to working towards a desirable afterlife. This ties in closely with my second aspect – the social side of gratification deferral – where individuals defer rewards to their children. Thirdly, I have considered the issue of value-addition, probably the most common type of deferral studied in psychology. Villagers such as Kaytesi commonly invest resources to generate further value in the future, in particular through their crops and livestock, but also through the education of their children. Investment in the future, however, is inherently risky and could lead to great expenditure of effort for little ultimate return. Finally, I have looked at the relationship between choice and constraint. Gratification deferral is, by its very nature, about electing to delay rewards, but I have attempted to show how this is not so straightforward. I have argued that people in the villages are able to make choices about where to orient their efforts and that they do frequently choose to defer gratification. However, I have also shown how these decisions are always constrained by the availability of resources, the uncertainty of the weather and the behaviour of others, and desires to uphold social norms and expectations. I offer below (Table 4-1) a number of examples of gratification deferral taken from this chapter, noting their degree of deferral, degree of (potential) gratification, the investment needed, risk involved, and whether it is chosen or compelled.

	Deferral	(Potential) Gratification	Investment / Cost	Risk	Chosen/ compelled
Visiting disco	Immediate	High	Medium	Low	Chosen
Itching jigger	Immediate	Medium (?)	Low	Potentially high if infected	Chosen
Charcoal industry	Immediate	Medium	High	Low	Chosen, but need for money compels
Eating meat	Mostly immediate	High	Medium	Low	Chosen
Reserving seeds	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Compelled
Keeping a cow	Medium	High	High	High	Chosen
Keeping an egg	Medium	Medium	Medium	High	Chosen
Having children	All (?)	High	High	High (?)	Socially compelled
Proselytising	Immediate + Long-term	High	Medium	Medium	Both

Table 4-1: Examples of gratification deferral

During my time staying with Kobusingye, she often told me that ‘when food is there we should eat it. You cannot know what will happen in the future’. This did not mean that they would be irresponsible with their resources, merely that they did not fastidiously deny themselves pleasures such as slaughtering and eating a chicken in order to save it for the future. After all, the chicken may be taken by a hawk the next day. However, this example merely serves to underline the difficulty in striking a balance between immediate and delayed gratification. Due to the relative wealth of their family in Kampala, as well as the fact that they are no longer providing for any offspring, the Ziwas have perhaps less worry about the future. In times past, it may have been a tougher choice to slaughter that chicken because it represented the chance either to earn money as it reproduced or to provide a valuable source of protein in its eggs. For someone in a similar position today, someone such as Kaytesi, they must continually weigh up the potential risks and benefits of keeping that chicken, and the shorter-term, but more certain, pleasure of eating it.

Chapter 5 - *MIKISA* (LUCK OR BLESSINGS)

*Some chances come from God,
and some chances come from the bajjajja [ancestors]*
(Mpagi, February 2014)

These were the words of Mpagi, a Muganda man in his early thirties, during a discussion we had about how people get the things they want. In Buganda, nothing happens without cause (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1976). For example, when you achieve an aim, enjoy a productive agricultural season, or your goat gives birth to two kids (rather than one), it is because some higher power has allowed this to happen – usually either God or the *bajjajja* (the ancestors), but potentially also other spiritual entities. Mpagi explains this, in English, as ‘chance’. In Luganda it is *mikisa*, a concept incorporating notions both of ‘blessings’ and of ‘luck’ – the two words most commonly used to translate *mikisa* into English.¹³ These alternative translations help us understand three important aspects of *mikisa*. Firstly, like blessings, *mikisa* must be bestowed upon you. Secondly, again like blessings, *mikisa* is a count noun, thereby reflecting the cumulative notion of getting multiple *mikisa* (sing. *mukisa*). Finally, the luck or chance aspect of *mikisa* alludes to the fact that the distribution of *mikisa* frequently appears unpredictable and even unfair.

The importance of *mikisa* in the pursuit of a good life is clear; without them, you are unable to get anything good. This is consistently evident in the way villagers talk about it. For example, Kaytesa told me, ‘if someone gets *mikisa* then they get good things [*bintu birungi*]’, and John Kiwanuka said, ‘you need *mikisa* to get the things for *embeera ennungi* [a good life]’. The relevance to this study of topics such as luck or *mikisa* should also be clear as an understanding of the mechanisms of *mikisa* goes some way to explaining how people in the village make sense of the relative inequalities within the community. It can sometimes be difficult to understand why

¹³ In my dictionaries *o-mukisa* is ‘good-luck; blessing’ (Bagunywa et al. 2009: 105; Snoxall 1967: 215).

one person fails while another succeeds, but when we understand *mikisa* it is easier to comprehend relative differences, even if they still seem unfair.

Of course, while the distribution of *mikisa* frequently appears to have an element of chance or unpredictability, it is important for people to be actively involved in attempting to enhance their *mikisa*, despite an awareness that their efforts may ultimately remain unrewarded. Doing so entails engaging with the various sources of *mikisa* – God and the different spirits – and the decisions involved in selecting the most appropriate route to gain *mikisa* can be confusing and problematic.

In this chapter, we meet Mpagi, and I will discuss the confusion he feels in how and from whom to pursue *mikisa*. I explain in greater detail where *mikisa* come from and how the best way to get them is simply to ask for them. I then look at how some of the ways in which villagers live their lives can affect their accrual of *mikisa*, before going on to explore some of the moral implications of different ways of achieving *mikisa*. The underlying messages of the chapter are that while villagers' lives may be ultimately determined by other powers, specifically God or other spirits, they nevertheless retain agency in their pursuit of a good life, and furthermore that villagers are continually making choices in the way that they do so, weighing up effectiveness, personal preference, and moral propriety.

MPAGI

David Mpagi was born in 1981 in a small village in Mubende district, around 100km from Bukula. He was the eleventh of twelve children. As his parents were unable to pay his school fees, when Mpagi was five they sent him to live with his older sister in Entebbe, a major town 50km from Kampala and the site of Uganda's principal international airport. Most of his schooling took place there, though with a couple of years back in the village. When he finished senior four (the fourth year of secondary school) his sister lost her job and was therefore unable to continue paying for his education. Nonetheless, this level of schooling means he is now one of the most

educated people in the immediate area around Bukula and he speaks English well (our one-to-one conversations were almost always in English). He considered going back to Mubende at this point but was reluctant due to the difficulty of finding a means of earning money. In the following years, he continued to live with his sister, taking on a number of different jobs and sometimes remaining unemployed for months at a time. He first worked in Entebbe zoo as a maintenance worker, before losing his job when a new manager came in and brought in his own people. He then went on to work for a bakery assisting a delivery driver, and then in a flower growing company, grading and packing flowers for export.



Figure 5-1: Mpagi with his wife and son

He met his wife, Nalukwago, while working for the flower company. Some friends at work told him of a woman in their home district of Kiboga, in the north of Buganda, and so they went to talk to her: ‘The first time she refused. I don’t know why – that was her secret’. His friends asked why he did not marry a girl from Entebbe, but as he told me, ‘you know, sometimes the people in the villages are better than those in the towns. I don’t know if you agree with me, but for us we always trust those girls

from rural places more than those from urban places'.¹⁴ So he persisted with the woman in Kiboga who eventually, on the third visit from Mpagi and his friends, agreed to marry him and moved to live with him in Entebbe. They have three children together, although Mpagi also has two others from other women, one before meeting Nalukwago and one after, both of whom live with their respective mothers far from Bukula. As far as I was aware, Mpagi no longer had anything to do with these children.

His parents moved to Bukula in 2007 after being evicted from their land in Mubende. The whole village where they had stayed had been settled without proper land rights, and when the area was turned into a nature reserve the residents were chased away 'without a single coin in payment'. Mpagi's parents had lived there for a long time and had developed their land with long-term crops such as coffee and bananas. Moving to Bukula, they had to start over with nothing. Mpagi's father's brother, Sowedi (Shaban's grandfather), lived in Bukula and told his brother about a piece of land which was available. Mpagi's father died less than a year after migrating to Bukula, and Sowedi advised Mpagi to come and take on the land, as he was the one selected as *musika* (heir) to his father's property and position in the clan. Despite preferring to stay in town, due to the increased opportunities for paid employment, as he had no realistic prospect of being able to buy his own land in Entebbe, Mpagi agreed and moved to Bukula with his family in 2008. His mother remained in the village for some time after this, but then moved to live with her relatives elsewhere in Buganda.

At first they found it very difficult moving to Bukula:

It is difficult coming to a new place. I realised if I dig [farm], then I have to wait until the end of the season [for the produce]. Where can I get soap and things? People knew we had come from the town so they didn't know that we can manage to dig, so people didn't want to give us work digging for them.

However, Kaytesa was the first person to give him some work. Mpagi worked in her garden for a few seasons, but he found it frustrating as he was unable then to concentrate on his own gardens: 'At the end of the season we didn't have enough of

¹⁴ See also Cheney (2007) on rural areas of Buganda being seen as sites of moral propriety.

our own food because every day I was digging there, so I had to keep on buying food'. In 2011, a group of people in the area surrounding Nalwewuba were attempting to set up a new primary school. The committee asked Mpagi to work there, largely due to his ability in English, and he was subsequently made head teacher. Nonetheless, he and his wife continue to tend their gardens.

Mpagi's father was Protestant, whereas his mother is Catholic. He said, 'That is the reason I am a Protestant, which is bad because in the Bible they advise each person to decide for themselves'. He suggested that he would perhaps like to convert to Islam, as many of his family in the area are Muslims (such as Sowedi), but Nalukwago would not be keen to change. He is a member of the small local Protestant church at Nalwewuba; however, he commonly stays at home on Sundays, taking his turn to cook. He admitted to me to being quite confused about his faith. He believes in and respects God, *Katonda*, but also greatly respects his ancestors:

What I want... because I got confused... I want to respect these *bajjajja* [ancestors], because they were created by God and they were human beings. And God is the creator of everything in the world. So, I have to respect God, and I have to respect the ancestors.

This confusion is reminiscent of Robbins' account of the Urapmin who, he argues, are 'troubled' by the apparent impossibility of being simultaneously good Urapmin and good Christians (2004). While the Urapmin maintain a firm distinction between traditional and Christian culture, in Nabikakala and Bukula there is greater overlap between elements of tradition and the world religions. Some in the villages, such as the Ziwas, Kaytesi, and Madina, appear very clear, remaining devout in their adherence to world religions and eschewing engagement with ancestor spirits. However, many others, including Mpagi, find it more difficult to reconcile two different systems. The tensions inherent in Mpagi's uncertainty make him a productive focus for this chapter and, in what follows, I will explore some of the reasons for his confusion. I consider, also, whether and how it is possible to 'respect' both God and the ancestors, or whether doing so is incompatible. The confusion Mpagi feels reflects a wider concern of many people in the villages over how to enhance their *mikisa* and

pursue the various elements required for a good life. I want to turn now to explore in greater detail where *mikisa* come from and how people can attempt to get them.

ASKING FOR MIKISA

The most simple and obvious way to get *mikisa* is to ask for them, either from God or from various spiritual entities such as the *bajjajja*. The importance of *asking* is evident in the Luganda word *okusaba*, which means both ‘to pray’ and ‘to ask for’.¹⁵ It is also seen in the term for ancestor shrines, *massabo* (sing. *ssabo*), which clearly shares an etymological root with *okusaba*. The *massabo* are the places people in Buganda go to ask the spirits for healing and assistance. The ones in the villages varied from grass cones around one metre high to larger, thatched, circular mud huts. While individuals or families may have their own private shrines, often these are tended and overseen by a diviner, medium, or healer – a *musawo muganda* (pl. *basawo baganda* – often just *musawo/basawo* is used). In what follows, I discuss the role God plays in distributing *mikisa* before going on to explain the spiritual realm and how these spirits can help villagers get luck.

God

According to Roscoe, *Katonda* (the Creator)¹⁶ was formerly a relatively little honoured god (1965 [1911]: 312; see also Peel 1977: 124), however in current times this is the name given to the single god of Christianity and Islam. Almost all villagers recognise *Katonda* as the Supreme Being, the creator of all else, while at the same time most regard the array of other powerful entities as also important. God is able to give *mikisa* and in order to enhance your likelihood of getting *mikisa* you must ask him. As Madina (Muslim) asked me, ‘Will he give you if you have not asked? You pray to Allah [*Katonda*] to give you what you want’, and Shaban (also Muslim) said, ‘We all ask

¹⁵ This reflects the etymological root of ‘to pray’ in English, meaning ‘ask earnestly, beg’ (“Pray” n.d. Online Etymology Dictionary).

¹⁶ The verb *okutonda* is ‘to create’.

God for what we want. You can ask him to help you achieve your aims’.

Religious institutions promote this idea. One week, I attended the service at the Protestant church in Nalwewuba. While most weeks the service is led by senior church members, on this occasion a minister (*musumba*) from Lukaya had come to baptise a number of young children, including Mpagi’s daughter. As part of his sermon, the minister explained to the congregation that if you serve God and do what he wants, when you then ask him for things he will give them to you. The message was similar when I went to Maka’s small church in Nabikakala. Maka was a father of twelve from Busoga, and was a very hard working and successful farmer. He was also a *mulokole* (‘saved’) pastor.¹⁷ On this occasion, Maka’s whole sermon revolved around the idea that even if you are very poor you can ask God and receive *mikisa*. Similarly, several members of the (Catholic) Ziwa family who live around Kampala frequently attend *Essangaalo*, an event held monthly at Mt. Sion Prayer Centre, Bukalango, not far from Kampala. The centre’s own website explains that *Essangaalo* is: ‘A Lugisu, Lunyole and Samia word for “Happiness”’, and that people come ‘to ask God MOVE immovable mountains, unachievable feats in life [*sic*]’ (Mt. Sion Prayer Centre Bukalango 2015). Interestingly, while ostensibly a Catholic centre it welcomes people of all faiths to these events. On the occasion I attended, on New Year’s Eve, the discourse from the religious leaders focused on material prosperity, God’s ability to give you what you want, and urging people to turn away from ‘witchcraft’ and *mizimu* (ancestor spirits). The religious leaders here seemed to be equating ‘witchcraft’ with the veneration of ancestor spirits.

However, while some villagers remain devout adherents to their religion, many others question the relative effectiveness of praying to God compared to asking other spirits, with the speed with which you receive things often the primary concern. Shaban said, ‘That is the reason that some people who ask God at first then wait a bit

¹⁷ The *balokole*, or the East African Revival, are a Protestant renewal movement with roots in Rwanda and Buganda from the 1930s. *Balokole* in Luganda means ‘saved people’. For some discussion of the movement see for example (Behrend 1999; Ward 1991; Winter 1983).

of time without getting. They then decide to go to ask somewhere else... in the *ssabo*'. But, as we can see with Mpagi, it is not only a question of effectiveness, but of whom he should be 'respecting'. To extend a quote from the last chapter, Mpagi told me:

You know, people go to church... it is just to show a picture to the other people, that these are good people. But in the night, people go to *massabo*. Most. Even like those ones with vehicles... those rich people. Every Sunday they sit in the vehicle with the whole family and they enter the church. People look at them and see they are people of God. That is why I cannot trust that one person is using God and another is using *lubaale* [spirits]. A church is something just for people to hide, during the day.

This quote reflects something my interlocutors told me frequently – people are more concerned with what others think of them than what God thinks of them. Mpagi's words suggest that praying to God is seen to be more socially acceptable than asking the ancestors. I will return to consider the morality of the pursuit of *mikisa* later in the chapter, but I want to turn now to discuss getting *mikisa* from the spirits.

Spirits

The second way of asking for *mikisa* is through the array of spiritual entities existing in Buganda. One may question whether these should be analytically separated from God, however given that virtually all villagers recognise *Katonda* as the singular Supreme Being, this analytical division is helpful. Providing an accurate account of these various spirits is difficult since people in the villages, even among the Baganda, sometimes understand them in different ways. In Luganda, the word *mpewo* (literally 'wind') is commonly used as a catch-all term for spirits. The term *bajjajja* (ancestors) can be used to refer to either *mizimu* or *balubaale*. In general, *mizimu* (sing. *muzimu*) are the 'ghosts' (Roscoe 1965 [1911]: 271) or 'ancestral spirits' (Ray 1991: 150–151) of the deceased. *Balubaale* (sing. *lubaale* – often only the singular form is used) are also usually described as ancestors but generally more powerful ones. They are variously described in the literature as 'gods' (Roscoe 1965 [1911]: 271), 'hero-gods' (Rigby 1975: 129), or 'legendary heroes' who became gods after their deaths (Ray 1977: 366). Ssekamwa contests calling them gods, arguing that they are more akin to Christian saints in that they act as 'intermediaries between God and man' (1967: 31).

Kodesh describes *balubaale* as ‘spiritual forces with a greater-than-local influence’ (2001: 525) or simply the ‘kingdom’s national spirits’ (2008: 207). They are usually attributed to a feature of the natural world, such as Mukasa (Lake Victoria) or Kiwanuka (thunder/lightning). In this way *balubaale* are similar to *mizimu* but, while the latter are local in their influence, *balubaale* are significant throughout Buganda. Mpagi called *balubaale* ‘small gods’, explaining that they are ‘our ancestors of many years ago – like those centuries after Jesus’ and differentiated them from *mizimu* which are ‘people who have just died – like up to fifty years ago’.

A further class of spirits, *misambwa* (sing. *musambwa*), are more difficult to explain. My understanding throughout most of my fieldwork was that *misambwa* are spirits which were created as such, and were therefore never human, and which are tied to features of the landscape such as trees, rivers, or hills. This understanding correlates with Peter Rigby’s explanation of *misambwa* as ‘river and hill spirits’ (1975: 129) and Paul Bukuluki and Christine Mpyangu’s as ‘nature spirits’ (2014: 18). However, while Kodesh agrees that they are territorial spirits, he suggests that they were in fact originally human (2008: 206), and Obbo refers to *misambwa* as ‘ghosts’, again suggesting they were originally humans (1996: 197). Some, such as Kyango, told me that the likes of Mukasa and Kiwanuka are actually *misambwa* rather than *balubaale*.

A final type of spirit is the *jjembe* (pl. *mayembe*).¹⁸ These are charms or fetishes purposely created by someone to increase their power or *mikisa* or, as Karlström explains, ‘to attack competitors with better businesses, jobs, gardens, and marriages’ (2004: 613). They can therefore be used for productive or destructive purposes. Kyango gave me the best explanation of *mayembe*:

Someone can make a concoction to try to live well, or not to encounter problems... For a *jjembe*, you get a piece of a tree and you can know if you add this thing and this thing... you will get more *mikisa*. You need a way to keep it safe. You get some kind of container with a lid and put the pieces of tree inside.

¹⁸ I have not included here two further classes of spirits I was told about because there was some debate around their existence and they were very rarely mentioned. These are *balongo* (literally ‘twins’) and *majinni* (linked to djinns in Islam).

But if you just put them in without anything else then it can rot. If you put in earth, it will rot. If you put in water, it will rot. The thing to put in is to slaughter a chicken, or a goat, or sheep, and put in the blood until it fills. After about two days, it dries and it keeps it. You need to put a stick with a small hole in it in the top for it to drink. The things inside there become a *jjembe*. There is an aim in making one. You may be a trader and you make one to attract customers. Or if you are a taxi driver it can help you quickly fill your taxi.

According to Mugema, a *musawo muganda* living close to Mpagi, unlike the other spirits, *mayembe* are transferable and can therefore be bought and sold. These can be particularly dangerous, because if you make a mistake in their creation or if you fail to control them properly then they can cause havoc. He explained to me the importance of carefully controlling *mayembe*, keeping them locked in a box and only removing them when you want to use them. An informant of Obbo told her of the ritual skill required to care for *mayembe* and she cites a correspondent on a Radio Uganda programme in 1992 discussing fears of ‘*mayembe* which multiply [like germs] when owners do not take care of them properly – that is, store them in securely sealed calabashes and make regular animal sacrifices to them’. The *mayembe* are then liable to randomly attack people the owner considers rich and successful (1996: 197).

Obbo makes it clear that *mayembe* need offerings in order to care for them, usually beer or water provided in special containers (see also Roscoe 1965 [1911]: 287) as they greatly dislike being thirsty (Kyango also explained the importance of allowing the *jjembe* to drink). Furthermore, following the fulfilment of a service, *mayembe* expect the blood of animal sacrifice. If they are not rewarded with this they are likely to possess and kill someone as payment for their service (Obbo 1996: 197).

This notion of care and reciprocity is prevalent across all relations between living humans and *mpewo*. As an informant of Hoising told him, ‘these spirits need us’ (2011: 22). The relationship is mutually beneficial. The cultivation of these relationships occurs at various levels from the household to ritual specialists. For the purposes of this chapter, I consider these different levels as aspects of the same thing and as such do not draw a firm distinction between them. Ritual specialists (*basawo baganda*) generally have a greater knowledge of the spiritual sphere and of ritual

processes and requirements and have access to more powerful spiritual entities. Nonetheless, lay people commonly have access to and cultivate relationships with their own ancestors, the *mizimu*. I discussed this in a series of conversations with Mpagi during which he explained to me about the three small baskets he keeps in his room for the ancestors – one for his mother’s side of the family, one for his father’s, and one for his wife’s. He makes small offerings of alcohol, coffee beans, or small coins to them. When I asked the reason for these offerings he said, ‘Respect. Just for respect’. He then explained that:

When you see you are facing some problems you go there and you kneel down and you explain to them that you are facing problems, and ask for help. Then you sleep, and at night you dream and they come to you saying, ‘we need our goat. That is why you are facing problems’.

ENHANCING YOUR *MIKISA*

Lubaale mbeera, nga n’embiro kw’otadde
‘God help me!’ – one pleads while running
(Lule 2006: 155)¹⁹

Asking either God or the various spirits to intervene in your life and grant you *mikisa* is one way of getting them, but there are also more pragmatic measures villagers can take to do so. The above proverb was one of those I came across most often and encapsulates the idea that you must take responsibility for helping yourself, much like the saying in English that you ‘make your own luck’. God or other spirits will only help you when you are already taking measures to help yourself. The way people would typically illustrate this proverb to me was to ask what I would do if I came across a lion while out walking, making the point that you cannot just ask God to save you but you must take action yourself – you must run away.

The belief in the need to work and to make efforts in order to get luck is widespread and is seen, for example, in recent work on luck or fortune in Africa

¹⁹ The ‘*lubaale*’ in this proverb technically refers to the minor gods, but the meaning of the proverb can be extrapolated to include *Katonda*.

(Gaibazzi 2015; Gardini 2015), and in Calestani's (2009) research on the need for *suerte* or luck in the pursuit of wellbeing in El Alto, Bolivia. In Gambia, Gaibazzi (2015) calls this the 'quest for luck' and explains how it embodies both uncertainty and also a hope that life will improve. I found this sentiment to be reflected in the common response when greeting someone in Buganda of '*ngeezako*' (I am trying).

The most obvious everyday example in Nabikakala and Bukula of the need to put in effort is in agriculture. If a farmer puts enough effort into their garden, they can hope to get a very good yield in return. However, this needs *mikisa*. The weather has to be favourable, the seeds have to have been good quality, it needs for livestock not to come and destroy the crops, and for the market to be good when it is harvest time. Of course, over some of these variables the farmer has a measure of control, but never ultimate control. You could get seeds from a neighbour who had a particularly good crop last season and you can erect a fence to keep out the cattle and goats, but the seeds may still struggle and the livestock may still find a way into your garden. You may not be lucky and not have a good season, but if you do not at least give yourself a chance of doing so then you will not. Namubiru, an elderly Muganda matriarch in Bukula, explained to me that 'you cannot sit around not digging and then go to a *musawo* to ask for good crops'.

Weather

Apart from actually doing the work required for agriculture, there are things villagers can do in order to increase the likelihood of favourable growing conditions. One such concern is the weather. I have noted throughout this thesis the two poor agricultural seasons during my time in the villages. In my second season in particular, daily conversation would focus on the sun, people worrying about how their crops would fare, and how they were going to manage to feed themselves, their families, and their livestock as it became increasingly clear that the season was going to be poor. Opinions varied on the reasons for the poor weather conditions and, while it was recognised that seasonal conditions fluctuated from year to year, many told me that farming had been

more productive in the past. Many explained that the main reason for the lower and less predictable rainfall was deforestation – a prominent issue in recent times in the country, but locally relevant in terms of the charcoal business.²⁰

Understandings of why this deforestation would result in changing rainfall patterns vary. Some just accept the word of the experts they hear on the radio, but others explain that *misambwa* spirits control rainfall and may withhold it if people's behaviour angers them. One man in Bukula who eschews world religions in favour of traditional beliefs told me how certain trees, *mivule* trees in particular, are the home of *misambwa*. He explained that someone with the relevant knowledge or skills is able to kneel down at one of these trees and send a message to someone far away. A number of years ago in a village nearby, he told me, workers were attempting to fell a tree in order to construct a road but no matter what they did, they were unable to remove the tree. Even a bulldozer failed to dislodge the tree from its roots. He said that when people show such disrespect for these *misambwa* the whole area can be punished.

In a strikingly similar vein, Nantongo, Mugema's wife, explained to me how the exile of *Kabaka* (King) Mutesa II in 1966 greatly affected agriculture. Following independence in 1962, she said, with the *kabaka* as president of Uganda, weather patterns were favourable and agriculture productive. However, since his exile things have never been so good. The resulting non-Ganda leadership forced various changes to traditional culture and this, along with the appropriation by the new administration of certain properties of the abolished kingdom, *ebyaffe* or 'our things', angered the *misambwa*. When I asked why the situation has not improved since the restoration of the kingship in 1993, she explained that there are still many of *ebyaffe* that have not been returned.²¹

Nantongo suggested that an influx of non-Ganda immigrants who do not know about certain traditional practices and taboos have further angered the *misambwa*. For

²⁰ Not least with the on-off debate about the future of Mabira rainforest to the east of Kampala (for example Wanambwa 2013).

²¹ Although in April 2014, after I left the field, many of these were returned to the kingdom.

example, on the border between Bukula and Lugalama there is a small pool where people draw water. It is forbidden for people either to wash clothes here or to step in it when drawing water. Even though some incomers know of the *musambwa* living there, they do not respect these prohibitions. I was told very early on in my fieldwork of some of the things which greatly annoy the *musambwa*, named Nabyegegezza, who lives around the natural well where the majority of Bukula's residents draw water, down in the plain a couple of kilometres from most homes. Taking water using something other than a jerrycan, or urinating or having sexual intercourse in the immediate vicinity of the well may greatly anger Nabyegegezza.

We can see here just one example of how *mikisa*, in this case for favourable weather, can be affected by people's behaviour and of the importance of living in the right ways to enhance the chances of getting these. In the next section, I want to go on to look at the relationship between having children and getting *mikisa*.

Children

Buli mwana azalibwa n'omukisa gwe
Every child is born with its own luck
(Mpagi, January 2014)

Having children is similarly a way of increasing the likelihood of getting *mikisa*. Children are at once a blessing and, if they are particularly blessed themselves, are also a potential route to prosperity in the future. Mpagi told me that the above proverb is something Muslims say (see also Gaibazzi's work among Muslims in Gambia (2015)), but that Protestants and Catholics do not believe this: 'Muslims say that even if they produce twenty children, the parents are not the ones to plan for the children – that is Allah. This is not true, because you cannot sit here while God pays school fees'. However, Kyango told me the same proverb in relation to the Baganda in general and I got the impression that many parents in the area, not just Muslims, have a similar attitude to having children. Kyango told me that:

Someone who decides to produce only two children, when they have money, is stupid [said with real force, almost shouting]. They try to buy good things for the children... to buy good food, paying school fees for them; but they get bad

luck if the children don't have a good brain. If you produce around eight, you may get the chance of at least one with a sharp brain. You can try to pay school fees for them at least in the lower classes, and you may get the chance that someone picks one, seeing they have a good brain, and pays fees for them. After finishing studies, this child can come back and help the parents. This is better than producing only two and you trying to do well for them, but they fail to do what you hope. That is why I told you that proverb – every child is born with its own luck.

The proverb above has a sense almost of preordination in it, an idea echoed as Kyango continued:

It is for God to decide what someone can be in the future. Do not worry whether they will do well or badly... that your child will be rich or poor, healthy, etc... Don't think about that. Wait for what God plans for him or her.

However, while people generally know that nothing can happen without God's will, they do not feel helpless. Nevertheless, my general impression, and Kyango's words, indicate that villagers feel that it is only worth investing in a child's future to a certain extent, because they may not get the *mikisa* needed to have a successful life.

Mpagi though is a little different to many in the village. While most of his contemporaries have another child almost every year, Mpagi and his wife began using medical birth control immediately after their first child. When I left the field this boy was twelve, their second son six, and their young daughter was one. Mpagi sees the difference as being his greater level of education and a subsequently increased ability to plan for the future. He would like to give his children a good education and knows that would be almost impossible if they do not space their births. Therefore, while he accepts that without God's blessing his children will not succeed, he realises that he has to help them as much as he possibly can, to give them the tools to develop their lives. Nonetheless, he says he still wants to have about another five children.

Mpagi's use of birth control raises questions regarding how much agency someone should effect in relation to God's plans. I met no one who said that using birth control was morally wrong. Mpagi accepts that the overall control will be with God because 'you can decide to stop with three [children], but you never know... any time you can be enjoying life with your wife at night and she becomes pregnant', but he sees it as more responsible to take steps to space his children.

Perhaps illustrating this more effectively than birth control is the issue of infertility, a source of great disapproval in Buganda. For many, before producing their first child they worry about whether they will be able to do so. Mpagi told me:

I faced that problem. Before I had my first child, I thought I had a problem in my eggs [*sic*]. I thought maybe something has happened. I was with my girlfriends, not using protection, waiting for them to tell me that they are pregnant, but I failed. I was getting worried.

In the case of someone who is apparently unable to produce children, should they decide to accept this as God's plan or do something about it? Everyone I asked said that it is good to try to find a way, either through visiting medical doctors or local doctors. When I pressed them on whether it was bad to go against God's plan, they maintained that it is good at least to try. Shaban made the point that 'someone with their magic can have decided for you not to produce, so that is why they try to use herbs. You can take the drugs, get a baby, and get happiness [*ssanyu*]'. If you try and it still does not work then you can accept that this is God's plan for you. It would be like malaria. You would not fail to treat malaria simply because it is 'God's plan' for you to have it. God always has the final say, so if he does not want you to have a child then the medicine will not work. Again, it can be seen here that you need to be active in fostering the conditions to increase your chance of getting *mikisa*, in this case the blessing of a child.

Twins

Twins (*balongo*) magnify the relationship between children and *mikisa*. Reflecting the wider ambiguity, or 'twoness', of twins in Africa (e.g. Renne and Bastian 2001) they are both revered and feared in Buganda, but confer great respect upon their parents, who take on the honorific titles *Ssalongo* (the father of twins) and *Nnalongo* (the mother of twins). Twins have the potential to bring *mikisa*, but also to bring misfortune (Hoelsing 2011: 72). I asked Mpagi whether he would like to have twins:

I want to get that chance of producing twins, but I just failed to produce. No one does not want twins. Twins are a chance in the family. They say that producing twins is one of the symbols that in the future you are going to become rich. It is a sign that God is planning; that in the future you will become

rich. There are not many people who have produced twins and remain poor. They produce twins when they are poor, and after maybe two years they get money.

However, like the examples I have covered to this point, the parents of twins cannot just sit back and wait for *mikisa* to come. Having twins requires a lot more ceremonial work than other children (Hoelsing 2011). Both Kagwa and Roscoe dedicate a few pages of their respective ethnographies to these ceremonies (Kagwa 1934: 105–8; Roscoe 1965 [1911]: 64–73), and while I believe some of these practices are no longer commonly followed (see also Beattie among the neighbouring Banyoro (1962)), not complying with the extra ceremonial requirements can have a detrimental effect on your life. Mpagi told me a story of a man in the village who did not take these responsibilities seriously:

When we reached this place that guy was very rich – he had two large shops in Lukaya [the nearby town], very large. But the guy made a mistake. He didn't complete the needs of *balongo*. The woman produced twins three times. In the hospital, they told him to ask people in the village how to do the needs of twins, because the people in the hospital are also Africans. [His father] is not a Muganda, but even those people have these things for twins. But the guy said that he cannot do those things because he is a *mulokole* ['saved']. Each time she produced twins he refused. The third time both twins died. They were advised to do the requirements. The middle ones then also died, and he remained with the first twins. He lost many things in Lukaya. He still hasn't done these things. That is why now he is suffering.

A conversation about twins with John Kiwanuka is also illuminating. He told me that if it were possible he 'would choose to produce twins. It is something that brings great respect to those who have had twins, because it is something very different. God created all people to produce one child at a time, but to produce two at a time is not common'. I then asked him whether there was any medicine you could take to increase your chances of having twins, and when he said he did not think so I explained that some fertility treatment used in my country does increase the likelihood. He then told me that this is not good 'because it is not from God'. However, the conversation continued with me asking whether it is good to use herbs from the *basawo* to help a couple become pregnant, and he said that this is fine, and that '*Katonda ayamba yeyambye*' (God helps he/she who has helped him/herself). It seems from this that

seeking God's help to achieve the normal or expectable is acceptable, but for something extraordinary, such as twins, it is not.

RELATIONAL LUCK

If everyone hates you then God cannot give you mikisa
(Kyango, February 2014)

In the previous sections, I have looked at some ways in which people in the villages deliberately seek *mikisa* through praying to God or other spiritual entities and at some more pragmatic ways people seek to maximise their possibilities of getting *mikisa*. Building on this, I will now turn to discuss a somewhat softer, more relational dimension of the distribution of *mikisa*.

Mikisa can be affected by your behaviour and your relations with other people. Kyango explained it to me in very blunt mathematical terms: 'Everything that you get starts from you', and so doing one good deed for someone earns you one *mukisa*. If you do many good deeds for many people then these can add up to make *mikisa*. He said that if you do something good for someone he or she will say to you, '*Katonda akwongere omukisa*' (God bless you [one blessing]). I think this articulation is probably an over-simplification and not representative of how most villagers act with regard to *mikisa* as it is far more common for people to use the plural form when expressing a wish for God to bless you, rather than the simple one *mukisa* for one good act suggested by Kyango. Nevertheless, the key assumption remains that your luck is at least to an extent influenced by your conduct with others. Kyango explained further with an example:

It is like this. If you come to me and you say that you don't have food and you are looking for some, and I tell you that my food is for my family, even though I have understood that yours are hungry... You go away knowing that I have food but have refused to give you any. For me, I have started to accrue *kisiraani* [misfortune]. I have brought it, because my cassava is there... I just didn't want to give it to you. That cassava can run out and even me I have hunger – *kisiraani* has started.

Alternatively, if you come and complain that your family is hungry and I tell you I only have a little left but that if you give me 5k shillings you can have one plant... You go with one sack and I give you your money back, explaining that

I am just giving you the food to help feed your children. You thank me so much, and then on the path home you can tell people that I gave you food, and gave you your money back. Then I have got *mikisa*.

This quotation from Kyango shows that luck works both ways – if you behave well then you increase your chances of good luck (*mikisa*), but behaving badly may bring upon you bad luck (*kisiraani* (pl. *bisiraani*)).²² From my fieldwork, *kisiraani* was the word most commonly used for misfortune or bad luck, although people would also sometimes use *mikisa mibi*, literally ‘bad *mikisa*’. However, in his work on ritual healing in Buganda, Hoelsing (2011) does not mention the word *kisiraani* and instead uses the term *bibi* to refer to ‘misfortune’, but also translates it as ‘bad things’ or ‘negative spiritual potential/energy’. The term *kisiraani* appears in only one of my three Luganda dictionaries where it is translated as: ‘bad luck; misfortune’ (Bagunywa et al. 2009: 65). It may be a term drawn from the Swahili word *kisirani* meaning ‘misfortune’ or ‘omen’.

While *kisiraani* and *mikisa* are basically two sides of the same coin, it seems that people have more direct agency over *kisiraani* than over *mikisa*. Villagers see *kisiraani* as being caused by a person’s own behaviour and that by behaving right you should be able to avoid it. Like *mikisa*, *kisiraani* must have a source, but this source was a subject of some debate. *Kisiraani* generally comes because a person has transgressed some social norm or etiquette. The first example of this I came across was prior to moving to Nabikakala while I was staying with Steven, one of the sons of Ziwa. We were sitting watching television and I had to get something from my room. Steven had his legs stretched out with his feet up on the table in front of him and, rather than bother him to move, I stepped over his legs. Steven and his wife were shocked, telling me in English that ‘here, we never jump people’. They explained that this brings bad luck, and if you step over a small child, their growth will be stunted.

When I discussed *kisiraani* with Mpagi he suggested that one cause is a woman

²² While *mikisa* are usually referred to in the plural I found that for *kisiraani* the singular was preferred.

‘behaving badly’, such as when food is ready in the garden but she spends all day visiting the neighbour just chatting and not cooking: ‘Those women who are behaving badly, sometimes they are the one bringing *kisiraani* within the family’.

These last few words are crucial. By transgressing social norms, you do not merely bring misfortune onto yourself, but onto the whole family. One of the most significant sources of *kisiraani* is suicide, most especially through hanging. This is considerably worse than other methods, perhaps due to the visibility of it and that it is undeniably a personal decision. Hanging yourself is thought to bring terrible misfortune to the remaining family, and a number of actions are taken after a hanging to diminish this. Before the body is cut down, the police are called and they will beat the body with sticks. If the person hanged themselves outside, then a hole is simply dug below the body, the rope cut (or possibly burned through), and the corpse left to drop into the hole. Traditionally, in a house with an earthen floor the process is the same, whereupon the family would move out and construct a new home. Now however, with the increasing prevalence of cement floors, the body is often taken outside and unceremoniously dumped in a small hole ‘like a dog’, as Shaban put it. None of the reverence typically paid to the deceased applies to someone who has hanged him/herself.

It may be easy to imagine that the misfortune stemming from a suicide by hanging could be a punishment meted out by God for a sin. But why would he punish the family members? Instead, Shaban explained to me, the misfortune is caused by the *muzimu* (ancestral spirit) of the deceased coming back to take others with them. As an informant of James Mugisha et al. explained:

A suicide will never go alone. He dies in annoyance and that means he has to *revenge* on others... and in most cases his or her spirit comes and takes both the *innocent ones* and those that might have offended him. Those that leave this world in anger, come back in anger [through their spirit] and even kill innocent creatures like children, chicken, goats and the like and even break trees, homes... and it does not matter whether you are a relative or not. The mission is killing... and revenge... (Mugisha et al. 2011: 629 emphasis in original)

Interestingly, *mikisa* seem to be seen as a reward from God for your good

behaviour, whereas the misfortune brought through misdemeanours appears to have another source, perhaps from angry ancestors or from upset *misambwa*, as their withholding of rain would similarly be considered to be *kisiraani*. From this and the preceding sections we can see that both negative and positive sides of luck are largely influenced by and dependent on fostering good relations with other people, spirits, or God. This is similar to what Marco Gardini found in Togo where he describes ‘a morally legitimate kind of luck that originated in social harmony, respect of the elders and of the ancestors’ (2015: 213). Interestingly however, in the context of my fieldwork, while social harmony was important, respect for the ancestors (the *bajjajja*) was more questionable. In the following section, I want to go on to discuss the legitimacy and acceptability of different means of achieving *mikisa*.

THE MORALITY OF *MIKISA*

Returning to Mpagi’s confusion around how to ‘respect’ both God and his ancestors and other spiritual entities, much of this confusion stems from his uncertainty about what is a ‘good’ way to get *mikisa*. The notion of ‘respect’, *kitiibwa*, is an ambiguous one in Luganda as it shares an etymological root with the verb *okutya*, ‘to fear’. Mpagi’s motivation to respect both his ancestors and God is therefore a complex blend of both positive and negative factors. He acknowledges that certain *basawo* operate immorally and that some can help their clients to succeed and become rich through nefarious practices, but he also believes that others are able to help you get what you want without anyone else suffering. If this is the case then he sees no moral problem with using the power of the spirits but he is still trying to work things out:

I am still making research to see which one is good. Because I read my Bible... I always listen to those people who go in *massabo*... sometimes I enter there and see what they can do. Some of the books we revise for school say that culture is important to learn and to teach to our people. So, if that thing is bad, why is the government talking about that and printing books about cultural things? And yet the government know what the Bible says. So for me, I got confused and I am still looking at what is going on.

However, perhaps the main reason Mpagi claims to be unsure about this is more

related to his fear of how others would perceive it. When I asked him about this, he replied:

Yes, good. I may go there and start getting money very speedy, and I build a new house... People can talk... they can wonder... With richness, sometimes it is good to get rich when you have passed through in good ways; not to just jump to reach the stage.

Clearly it is not just important what you have or get, but how you have achieved this. The Major in Nabikakala was a useful example for me to use with people, and on one of my first days with Mpagi we were discussing what it means to live a good life. He told me that the Major has a good life, because he has money. However, when I asked Mpagi if he would like to swap lives with the Major, he was quite adamant that he would not because 'when I walk around Bukula people like me. They do not like the Major'. The Major is seen to have achieved his wealth and his 'good life' in a bad way. Kyango explained to me that even though the Major has the material wealth that others desire, these are not *mikisa*, they are just '*bintu*' (things): 'It is *kisiraani* – for him and for others'. Others however, such as Mpagi, say that the Major's things are *mikisa*, just unethically attained, since they are achieved at others' expense. Kyango went on to say:

Both you and other people should benefit from your things. For example, the Major benefits from his things, but other people do not, whether they are related to him or not. Even if you are a brother or sister of his, if you take one of his cows, then he may take a gun and shoot you.

The question is why are some things considered bad pursuits and some things are more approved? To help answer this question it will be helpful to consider what things God and the spirits can assist with. It is perfectly acceptable to ask God to help both with problems or to get what you want. You may pray to him to help cure a sick child or to help make you wealthy. Shaban told me, 'We all ask God for what we want. Even when you do not have trouble, you can ask him to help you to achieve your aims'.

Seeking *mikisa* from the spirits is more questionable. At times, I was told that these spirits can only be used for good. When I discussed with Mugema his work as a *musawo*, he said that *balubaale*, *mizimu*, and *misambwa* cannot allow you to do bad

and could even kill you for it. He explained that the spirits could be used to help a man find a wife, but not to sleep with lots of women; to overcome sadness, but not to make someone happy; to help you find a job, but not find you lots of money because you want a motorbike. From these discussions with Mugema, it appears that these spirits can have a remedial function in helping surmount problems, but cannot get you beyond a threshold of attainment that might be considered expectable or ordinary.

I was told by others, however, that there are *basawo* who can use these spirits to help you achieve your wants, not solely to overcome bad. As Hoelsing notes regarding *basawo*, ‘power to harm and power to heal remain inextricable; knowledge of one begets knowledge of the other’ (2011: 70). This may be particularly true of *mayembe*, which, as we saw, are made either for the owner to get something they want or to ‘attack’ competitors. People within the villages would tend to tell me that the local *basawo* do not do these kinds of things and only work to heal and to help. It is always those *basawo* a little farther away that will do that. Yet a majority maintain that this happens. The most extreme example, frequently given to me in the villages, was child sacrifice. Caplan (2010) questions the actual prevalence of this practice in Uganda but, regardless of this, the belief nevertheless exists that individuals can sacrifice a child at the behest of a *musawo* in order to secure wealth. This, Mpagi told me, is a way to gain wealth very quickly.

The degree of social approval for using these spirits to pursue your desires is called into question partly because of suspicions over whether other people are suffering through your doing so. While I did not come across anyone who told me that God was bad, I frequently did so with regard to the spirits. Some of my interlocutors were quite adamant that the *basawo* work with Satan and that getting things from the spirits is really from Satan. Shaban said that people who go to *basawo* are those who follow (*abakkiriza*)²³ Satan, and Madina told me, ‘you only go the *basawo* if you know

²³ The verb *okukkiriza* means ‘to accept’, ‘to agree’, or ‘to believe’. When it is translated as to believe, therefore, it is not so much concerned with the existence or otherwise of Satan, but whether you accept him. It took me some time to realise this nuance as people would tell me ‘I do not believe [*sikkiriza*] in *lubaale*’, and yet would nevertheless talk about their existence.

Satan'. She said she has never been to one, adding that if you do go then Allah will see and become angry. In a similar vein, Kaytesa described spirits such as *misambwa* and *mizimu* as 'demons' which 'get on well with Satan'. While in these instances the association with Satan was a negative one, in Mpagi's case it was less clear-cut. He too equates the ancestor spirits with Satan. He uses the terms *lubaale*, *bajjajja*, or 'small-gods' interchangeably.

{Mpagi} What they [other people] call Satan, those are my friends.

{Stephen} So *lubaale* are Satan?

{M} They are my ancestors. They are Satan for other people. For me they are my ancestors. I cannot leave them. In the book [the Bible], they are called Satan. They were given the title Satan.

{S} Does that mean they are evil, that they are bad?

{M} But for me they have never tried to do something wrong in my family.

{S} Why can it not be that there is God, there is Satan, and somewhere in the middle there are these *lubaale*?

{M} They are not classified in three grades – they are in two.

{S} But that means they are either good or evil. God is everything good, and Satan is everything bad. In the Bible, it is like that. So where are *lubaale*?

{M} It is in the Bible, but people don't agree with that thing. Most people. If the small gods were bad, the government would have come and arrested those people who build those small houses [*massabo* – shrines] behind their houses.

Mpagi's confusion is evident here. He realises that, from the perspective of his religion, the *lubaale* are immoral, but he himself struggles to believe this to be the case. I asked him whether God can accept or permit people to get things from the spirits, to which he answered simply, 'God cannot agree with us'.

To complicate matters further, some villagers will say that whatever comes from the spirits still ultimately comes from God, as he is more powerful. For example, to back this up, Shaban (somewhat confusingly given his previous comments linking

Robbins (2007: 14) offers an interesting discussion of the semantic history of the verb 'to believe', distinguishing between 'to believe in' and 'to believe that'. The former corresponds most closely to the Luganda. To believe in something, Robbins says, 'means to trust it and implies a commitment to act in a certain way toward it'.

basawo with Satan) explained that when giving you medicine a *musawo* may say to you, ‘May God help you’. Even so, he went on to say that ‘belief in God conflicts with *eby’obuwangwa* [tradition/culture]. The [religious] books say not to accept having *massabo*’.

It is apparent that a critical aspect to what is considered an approvable pursuit is whether it is deemed to cause someone else to suffer. Of course, just because it is considered socially problematic does not necessarily stop people doing it, only that it becomes hidden. Theft is a prime example of gain at another’s expense, while making use of the spirits is morally problematic due to the uncertainty over whether doing so leads anyone else to suffer. Getting *mikisa* from God does not result in harm to others.

An important factor in a pursuit being seen to be ethical is that it must be known how it was achieved. If someone becomes wealthy and other villagers are not sure how this happened, they may be suspicious. Mpagi suggested that if he were to become rich now people could remember his relationship with me and suppose that his wealth had somehow come from this connection to Europe, and so this would be a legitimate gain. People’s efforts to be seen in church or the mosque may similarly be a means of presenting a legitimacy.

However, God does not bless people equally. You could have two identical people in identical situations and one gets blessings from God while the other continues to suffer (see also Gaibazzi’s similar example of diamond mining in Gambia (2015: 231)). Most villagers would tell me that it is just God’s plan, and this plan is unknowable. To an extent, there is a pragmatism about this. Knowing that achieving ‘the good’ is ultimately outwith one’s own control, and even outwith worldly control, can limit jealousy. However, it can also work the other way. People can see others getting blessings whom they consider less virtuous or pious than they are, while they are left with nothing. Muzeeyi Ziwa once told me that there is some twist in the world that means that people who have been good people and worked hard may not

necessarily achieve, or if they do so, they may then have these things taken away from them.

The foundation for what a person in the villages can and should do to influence their ‘getting’ of good things is intricately tied up with what is socially approvable and what is socially expected to be or to have for any given person – a ‘neutral’ point so to speak. As such, the pursuit of good is a profoundly moral concern. Certain ways of trying to achieve are socially acceptable for certain goals, and I posit that there is a dividing line at the ‘neutral’ point defining which ways are considered acceptable. The methods people can legitimately use to reach a level that is considered normal or expected for a person in their position are more varied than those that are considered proper for pursuing anything beyond this. For example, some things are very socially acceptable to take to the *basawo* for treatment, such as perhaps fertility issues or certain illnesses. Others are a little less openly acceptable, maybe certain social problems. And others are anathema, such as child sacrifice. Broadly, it seems to be more acceptable to use *basawo* to deal with problems, for supposed remedial activities, but less so in order to go beyond this to seek good things. Getting anything through God, on the other hand, is socially acceptable; however, it may be counter to an individual’s beliefs or simply be seen as less effective.

CONCLUSION

Looking at *mikisa* is important for understanding the pursuit of a good life in Buganda because this is the means through which villagers are ultimately able to achieve their hopes and aims. Without *mikisa*, it is impossible to live well. It is necessary to work hard and to make efforts to achieve what you seek, but without God, the ancestors and other spirits, or perhaps Satan, you will not succeed. However, *mikisa* contain an aspect of uncertainty in that it is unpredictable who will get them. Two people may work equally hard in their gardens and one may fail to get a good yield, while the other has a very productive season. One positive consequence of the unpredictability of the

distribution of *mikisa* is that it gives villagers hope that no matter their situation, they can get luck and their life can improve. On the other hand, it can have the opposite effect and cause people to wonder why their hard work has not been rewarded while their neighbour's has.

However, villagers are not just passively waiting for *mikisa*. There are a number of things they can do to enhance their chances of getting luck, beyond the necessity to work for it. These include praying to or asking God or an array of spiritual entities; living in the right way, such as having children and respecting traditional culture; and living well with others in a socially responsible manner.

I propose here that managing the acquisition of good luck, *mikisa*, and avoiding the accrual of bad luck, *kisiraani*, is fundamentally about cultivating and tending relationships. At the local level you ought to treat others well, do good things for them, and act with empathy and compassion. This extends to relationships with ancestor spirits and, beyond this, with other spiritual entities such as *misambwa* and *mayembe*. These relationships too must be cultivated, and in exchange for respect, offerings, and doing their bidding, these spirits may bring *mikisa* or help ward off *kisiraani*. Finally, to get *mikisa* from God you must also cultivate this relationship, again with respect as well as prayer, attendance in places of worship, and ideally the renunciation of other spiritual forces. In the following chapter, I go on to explore the importance of fostering connectedness with kin, both living and deceased. Indeed, there are close ties between these two chapters, not least as Kyango is a *musawo*.

This chapter has been concerned not only with the mechanics of how to get *mikisa* but also with the moral question of how and from where or from whom to do so. While some villagers are sure of the relative moral propriety of getting *mikisa* from God or from spirits, for most it is less clear-cut. For people such as Mpagi, they are confused about what is right and are caught between two systems that, on the surface, and certainly from the perspective of the world religions, are incompatible. Nonetheless, Mpagi draws on both, attempting to respect God and his ancestors. In making choices where to get *mikisa*, villagers face a variety of considerations – the relative

effectiveness of the different sources, their own ideas of what is right, and the moral judgement of other people.

Chapter 6 - CONTINUITY AND CONNECTEDNESS

As part of my attempts to understand how people in Nabikakala and Bukula try to live well, I paid close attention to the decisions villagers made concerning the course of their lives. Exploring the background to these decisions and the reasons for them proved informative. I take inspiration for this approach partly from Jackson's call for an 'anthropology of events' (2005: xxv–xxviii), but more particularly from Jennifer Johnson-Hanks' concept of 'vital conjunctures' (2002). Vital conjunctures are 'experiential knots during which potential futures are under debate and up for grabs' (2002: 872). They are turning points in a person's life that open up spaces for aspiration and opportunity.

In this chapter, I focus on Kyango, a man in his seventies living in Bukula, and on one particular vital conjuncture in his life where he gives up his job as a carpenter to pursue a wholly different vocation as a *musawo muganda* (local healer). This dramatic change raises interesting questions for a scholar of wellbeing. What led Kyango to change his life so suddenly and so markedly? Was he dissatisfied with how his life was going? Did he envisage a better life? Did he even have a choice? Was it more through a sense of duty to the ancestors or to other people? What is Kyango gaining through this change? What is he giving up? Why now? There are no straightforward answers to these questions and the impetuses for the change are manifold, however this example provides an intriguing point of rupture in Kyango's life through which we can explore a range of interconnected themes. In what follows, I examine the reasons and significances underlying this shift in Kyango's life. The discussion will take its lead from the ways in which Kyango talks about this change, and will move through a number of topics including the afterlife, helping others, culture and tradition, wealth and material gain, and social status. The chapter will culminate in an argument that two key drivers in Kyango's transformation are the entwined themes of connectedness and continuity. Furthermore, I contend that a sense

of connectedness and continuity are important factors in wellbeing for Kyango and the other residents of Nabikakala and Bukula.

KYANGO

It took me a long time to meet Kyango, most likely as he spent most of the daylight hours working in Kiti. It was a day about nine months into my fieldwork when he cycled past Moses' house and Moses, knowing that Kyango was one of the few residents of Bukula I had yet to meet, pointed him out to me whilst simultaneously calling for Kyango to stop. Kyango expressed repeatedly how happy he was to meet me, having seen me many times in the area. He invited Moses and me to his home the following day.

I had always been intrigued by Kyango's home – I passed it almost every day on my way into Bukula. His property was fenced, which was not particularly unusual, but what was peculiar was the gate to his compound – something very rare. Dismounting and pushing our bikes up the short path, we came to a well-built house, which had been constructed for him by the Irish non-governmental organisation GOAL. The compound looked neat and well tended, in contrast, I later discovered, to the cluttered front reception room. A dried bat hung on a banana fibre string from the apex of a stilted granary next to the house, constructed by another NGO. When I asked Kyango about this noctilionine decoration, he replied only that it was '*ddagala*' (medicine).

On this and each subsequent visit we would sit in the front room; Kyango in his armchair and Moses and I next to each other on a sofa, usually squashed in beside a pile of clothes. One corner of the room contained an array of agricultural and carpentry tools, another a spread of pots, dishes, and thermos flasks. On the wall above Kyango's head hung three kerosene hurricane lamps, a clock without a battery, and various posters – a map of Buganda, a calendar with photos of the Ganda royal family, and another detailing all the Ganda clans and their totems.

These posters and the *ddagala* outside were early clues to Kyango's deep interest

in *eby'obuwangwa* (broadly 'cultural things'), something which quickly became apparent during our first conversations. His openness and the insights he was willing and able to offer on these things and about his life quickly led me to envisage focusing a chapter on him and I asked him to be one of my key informants.

Kyango Nyago Bakaluba Tofa was born in Bukula in 1944. (His memory for dates and his age at different point in his life was quite remarkable and in contrast to that of most others in the villages.) The eldest of eight siblings, Kyango completed two years of primary school in Kiti, and a further year in Bukulula, the current sub-county (LC3) headquarters. By this time he was already in his mid-teens, however his parents could no longer afford to pay for his schooling and he returned to Bukula and 'started to work, much like my grandfather – digging, hunting, fishing... things like that. We used spears and traps. In those days, there were many animals'. He spent his late teens and early twenties living at home in Bukula, and then had a brief period in Nabikakala staying in the empty house of a relative. He remained unmarried at this point as he was trying to find his feet:

During this time in the village there were different woman I was involved with, much like you can decide to buy a new shirt and then after a while you decide you want a different one. They were many, but I did not have a woman at home that could be considered my wife. I delayed a long time to marry.

In 1969, Kyango moved to Kampala to look for work, and it was not until the mid-1980s that he returned to Bukula: 'I decided to leave Bukula because at that time there was little market for the work I did here. It only served to get food, not to get money. I wanted work which could give me money'. In the city, he found work as a porter on a building site run by Indians. When, in 1972, President Idi Amin expelled from the country the large Asian community Kyango lost his job: 'I was lucky, because despite starting as a porter I was able to learn to build before they had to leave, so I started to work alone. I was building my entire time in Kampala. Sometimes a good thing can come from a bad thing'.

It was in Kampala, at the age of 33, that Kyango met his wife while working

during the weekends selling *matooke* in Kabalagala market:

She came to buy some *matooke*. I liked her, and after she came to buy from me a few times I started trying to speak to her. Thankfully, she seemed to like me, and I started giving her the *matooke* for free. Then she moved in with me, and I started having a household.

We did not have a wedding, nor really a *kwanjula*, but after we produced our first child, I sent her to her village to tell them I was coming to visit. I brought a few gifts – sugar, meat, a *kanzu* for the father and a *gomesi* for the mother... not so much. They were very happy.²⁴

In all they had eight children, three in Kampala and a further five after returning to Bukula in 1986 because they ‘were tired of life there. It was difficult to find food’. Only four of his children are still alive, and in 1998 his wife left him and returned to the city with the children. He is still in touch with them, but sees them only rarely. Since then he has lived alone, with the exception of a nine-month period in which he lived with a woman who had come from Kampala. He does not really want to live alone but says:

If you are living with others, they can disrupt your things. I would really like to get a new wife, one that does what I want, but many just do what they want. Or I could have a child... maybe a grandchild... to help out a bit, but so many just want to play football, go to the disco. They just do what they want.

When I first met him Kyango’s life seemed to revolve around a fairly set routine. He would get up early and spend some time in the garden, before cycling to Kiti trading centre where he spent the day in his carpentry workshop.

With my work as a carpenter, I can make maybe 80-100k in a month, but other months you can make only 500 or 1,000 shillings. In a normal growing season, I can maybe make 100k, or maybe 50k or 30k [from the garden]. But it depends on luck [*mikisa*].

He would eat in Kiti at lunchtime and, come dusk, would cycle back towards home, stopping off at Nalwewuba to eat in the small restaurant there and chat to some friends. He explained to me, ‘It is a lot of trouble to cook every day just for myself. It saves a lot of time’.

²⁴ The *kwanjula* is the traditional ‘introduction’ ceremony when a man’s family visit the family home of the woman and bring bridewealth.

The *kanzu* and *gomesi* are the traditional formal attire of men and women respectively.

A TRANSFORMATION

Then Kyango changed. He suddenly became evasive and it was difficult to get hold of him. On the rare occasions we were able to meet with him he appeared distracted. Weeks passed in which I barely saw him. Kyango had provided me with some of the most interesting discussions of my fieldwork and I was becoming worried we would not get the chance to continue before I was due to return home. He had been so willing and enthusiastic before and seemed to relish the opportunity to speak, so the change in his behaviour was surprising. Moses was unsure what had happened, but suggested that perhaps Kyango was having ‘problems with his *lubaale* [spirits]’.

Eventually one day he told Moses and me to visit the following morning. I turned up at the appointed time, about forty-five minutes before Moses arrived. Kyango’s front door was wide open indicating that he was home, but there were no replies to my calls of ‘*ab’eno?*’ – ‘is anyone here?’ I could hear voices behind the house but was reluctant to venture round, aware from a recent conversation with Moses that Kyango had a *ssabo* (shrine) there. Persistent calling brought Kyango round to greet me, and he led me round the house where I found a neighbour of his seated on a bed of dried grasses. Beside this man stood a small conically constructed grass *ssabo* a little over a metre in height and about 80cm in diameter – the first *ssabo* I had come across which was not one you can physically enter. In front of the entrance were two small calabashes, a small spear, some barkcloth (a material made from the bark of a type of fig tree), a pipe, and a bent bicycle spoke (which, I discovered, was for cleaning and stuffing the pipe).

Kyango asked me to sit on a mat, indicating to remove my shoes, and we chatted a little about Scotland and the crops we grow there. He explained that we would get the chance to discuss what I wanted to later on, but at the moment he and the neighbour had some ‘cultural things’ (*eby’obuwangwa*) to do. He and the man shared some local beer from one of the small calabashes, and a little later, they offered some to me. As we talked, Kyango stuffed a pipe with a whole dried tobacco leaf, lit it by striking two

matches simultaneously, and started puffing on it heavily. He explained to me that his *jjajja* (grandparent or ancestor) had smoked a pipe and that by doing so he was able to communicate with him. After a number of minutes, Kyango began to whistle tunelessly and his body then appeared to shudder, twitch, and convulse. His voice changed to what sounded to me like a kind of voiced whisper and his mannerisms and comportment became noticeably different. It was apparent this was the *jjajja*. It was my final month of fieldwork and I had largely given up hope of seeing a spirit possession.

The discussion from this point on was pervaded with humour. A number of times the *jjajja* (as it was no longer Kyango) stood up and demonstrated his ability to sit on burning logs on the fire without being burned. He even asked Moses to feel the seat of his trousers to show how hot it was. At one point he brought out a small piece of wood from his pocket to show us – the knot in the wood looked like a man bending over showing his bottom. Later he took a bottle of honey from the small *ssabo* and mixed it in equal parts with water and gave us all some to drink, explaining that he takes care of his visitors. This was the only time in my entire fieldwork when I knowingly drank unboiled water, as I was wary of offending the hospitality of the *jjajja* on potentially my only meeting with him.

The *jjajja* then brought out a wrapped piece of barkcloth about 30cm square. Unwrapping it in front of himself revealed the *myeso*, the array of trinkets he uses for divining, including old coins, small and large cowrie shells, a marble, some pieces of metal, and various other small oddments. He collected all this up in his hands, tapped his hands on his head, on the barkcloth, and on one remaining big shell left on the cloth, and then dropped the pieces on the cloth. He explained that there was no way any of us could understand them, and that even Kyango would have no idea, but that he, the *jjajja*, is able to read the configuration. He had a short discussion with the neighbour and re-threw the pieces two or three times. After telling the man to return in the evening, the *jjajja* slowly left Kyango. Upon his return, Kyango looked tired and a little confused, and Moses explained to me that when a spirit leaves the body a

person can feel very bad as it takes a lot of energy from you.



Figure 6-1: Kyango (or rather his jjajja) with his myeso

From this event and our subsequent discussion with Kyango, things began to make more sense. His sudden busyness and distraction was because his ancestors (*bajjajja*) were assigning him work. He was neglecting his carpentry workshop in Kiti to re-thatch his existing larger *ssabo*, to keep fires smouldering for the *bajjajja*, and to develop further the sacred space in his garden.²⁵ Drumming and chanting I had heard coming from his house a couple of weeks previously had been a family gathering. The gate to his compound had been removed, creating a more welcoming environment.

²⁵ Ray describes the distinction in Buganda between the profane (the world of the living) and the sacred (the world of the deceased). He argues that shrines (*massabo*) 'most prominently incorporated the sacred realm into the earthly kingdom' (1977: 366).

Kyango had gone from merely dabbling in these ‘cultural things’ (as he called it), and about which he had never previously talked to me, to becoming a *musawo muganda*, or a local healer. He spent his days redeveloping and maintaining his *massabo* (pl. of *ssabo*), and he began treating patients.

UNDERSTANDING KYANGO’S TRANSFORMATION

Kyango was quite open that this was a major change in his life. When I asked about the impetus for these changes, he explained that around 10-20 years ago, he and some relatives began some ‘*kunoonyereza*’ (research). At the behest of the *bajjajja*, they constructed their *massabo*, but ultimately little came of their research. Recently however, Kyango had met a man who, he said, ‘showed me the light. He came and told me how to do things’. Now, every day the *bajjajja* give him work (*mirimu*), reminiscent of the ‘work’ Rita Astuti explains the Vezo ‘had to perform for their dead in order to keep them happy’ (1994: 113). Kyango said, ‘In the past it was not like that, but since I have started this new system, every day, any time of day, they can give me work to do. If they tell me to do something, I stop what I am doing and first do what they ask’. This work has taken over his life, again raising the question of the extent to which Kyango’s new activities were chosen. I return to this question at the end of this section.

However, before I go on to explore how we can make sense of Kyango’s transformation, it will be helpful to provide some discussion of the roles and functions of a *musawo muganda* and of the social and cosmological background underpinning this.

***Basawo baganda* (Local healers)**

I have elected to use the term *musawo muganda* (pl. *basawo baganda*) in this thesis to cover a range of local ritual and medical specialists, which I gloss in English as ‘local healers’. My use of the term *musawo muganda* reflects how I found it used in the villages. While Roscoe made a distinction between priests (*bakabona*), mediums

(*mandwa*), and medicine men (*basawo*) (1965 [1911]: 273–9), Obbo argues that by the time of her fieldwork in the mid-1990s these differing roles were suffused (1996: 189). *Musawo* is the Luganda word for doctor, healer, or health worker, and covers both medical doctors and nurses as well as local healers. A *musawo muganda* is a local healer while a *musawo muzungu* is a ‘white doctor’, used to refer to a practitioner of western medicine. Virtually every village will have at least one *musawo muganda* and while some simply use their knowledge of local herbs to provide treatment for patients, others harness the knowledge and power of the various spiritual entities in their diagnosis and treatment. Kodesh (2008) has suggested that collective health and wellbeing is the basis for clanship in Buganda and has demonstrated the importance of clan shrines or burial grounds (*biggwa*) for these practices. While Kyango’s activities are important for his lineage and clan, his healing practices are not limited to clan members. Rather than dwell too much on definitions though I want to briefly explain how Kyango sees his new role.

From our discussions, it was clear that Kyango acts largely as a conduit channelling the knowledge of various ancestors into his healing practices. As he explained numerous times, he himself does not have the healing knowledge and he does not know what happens when he is possessed. He told us, ‘If you come and speak with them [the spirits], and they tell you to do this and that, when they leave me you need to tell me what they said’. I asked him what they can help with; what kinds of issues he and they are able to treat:

Myself, I can’t really know. It is they themselves who do it. When they have found the problem and said what needs to be done... what money it needs... then they start there. Everything that can harm you [*ekikuluma*]: illness, or if you have not yet found a wife... But malaria, they don’t help with that. But some kind of sickness that someone has brought you, if someone has bewitched you... they do that. Or a wind [*mpewo*], because we call them winds, can come and disrupt you, but you do not know what it is that is disturbing you. You see you are suffering... there is someone who is demanding something of you. The *bajjajja* can explain what the problem is and what you need to do. If they give you medicine, or if you just have to wash with some herbs, you go and do what they say. Or if someone insulted you... or someone owes you money... or if someone stole from you...

However, as well as healing, Kyango’s role also involves caring for the *bajjajja*

through the work they ask him to do, such as maintaining their *massabo* or bringing them alcohol. As Kodesh says, ‘Like their Great Lakes neighbors, Ganda had long recognized the importance of maintaining healthy relationships with their ancestors’ in order to preserve social wellbeing (2008: 213). In this way, theirs is a relationship based on exchange, and is one that Kyango must actively cultivate in order to benefit both himself and those who seek treatment from him. In the following section, I want to look more closely at the afterlife, the realm of the *bajjajja*.

The afterlife

Beliefs in the village about what comes after death are a fusion of traditional beliefs and Christian or Muslim doctrines. Many believe in paradise and hell, but almost every person also believes in the existence of ancestral ghosts (*mizimu*) which remain on earth. Reconciling these two ideas takes various forms. Madina explained that *mizimu* are the invisible spirits of the deceased coming back to the earth. She said that while the spirits of ‘good’ people will enter *jannah* (paradise), others are condemned to *jahannam* (hell). Some spirits manage to escape from hell, much like a prisoner escaping from a jail, and these escaped spirits of bad people are the *mizimu*. In Kaytesi’s case, she says that as a non-Muganda she understands these things poorly, however she accepts that it seems that something like *mizimu* exists. She believes that *mizimu* are the manifestations of demons, or bad angels. Shaban’s explanation also pertains to angels. In his understanding, the *muzimu* differs from the *mwoyo* (soul).²⁶ He says, ‘In Islam they teach us that people are born with their angel. If you die, it does not die. It remains there. That is how when someone dies they are able to see what happens to their children’. Shaban understands this angel to be the *muzimu*. While the *muzimu* remains on earth for ever, the *mwoyo* goes either to paradise or to hell. Alternatively, as Mpagi believes, the *mwoyo* and *muzimu* are one, and when a person dies, the *mwoyo* stays on earth for a period of time, perhaps around ten years, before

²⁶ My dictionary translates ‘*mwoyo*’ as ‘spirit; soul; heart/mind’ (Bagunywa et al. 2009: 116).

the angels come and take them either to heaven or to hell.

Accounts of *mizimu* vary from person to person, and indeed many do not seem to be clear in their understanding. Much of the uncertainty and variation arises, I believe, from the confusion of meshing not only traditional Ganda beliefs with the doctrines of different versions of Christianity and Islam, but also the mix with people from other parts of East Africa, especially so with Kaytesa for example. Nonetheless, some commonalities are obvious in that they are an invisible manifestation of the deceased, and especially of the relatively recently deceased.

Much of the time, *mizimu* are generally only noticeable when they are causing trouble; *mizimu* can come back to disturb living relatives when they are unhappy about something. However, many others have told me of the beneficence of *mizimu*. For instance, Mpagi described to me how *mizimu* might come to him in his dreams to forewarn him of something. By way of an example, he suggested they might come and advise him that the next morning he should take a different route to his work in the local school, only for him to find out later that someone was attacked on his normal path.

In Kyango's case, he says his *mizimu* are a source of good and provide him with the knowledge and ability to help others. He does not believe that people go to heaven or hell, despite explaining to me that he is a Catholic ('because my father and mother and grandfather were Catholics'), and he maintains that only certain people come back as a *muzimu*.

Someone who has done these things, as I am doing, then their spirit comes back. I am sure. They bury his body, but his spirit comes back. When he dies, the spirit comes out and stays there. They just bury the flesh. They [my *bajjajja*] have told me that when I die and they bury me that I am going to come back.

Tellingly, he later elaborated that when one returns as a *muzimu*:

The important thing is you stay here for ever and ever. I am sure that if a person does the things as I am doing, then they stay for ever. What I am doing these days, those *bajjajja* did the same things. The one who is going to be my *musika* [heir] when I die will have to do the same things as me.

About two to three years after the *lumbe* [funeral rites], that *muzimu* starts to

look among their children or grandchildren for who can do like them. My *jjajja* saw that I can do the thing that he/they want.

We can therefore see that as far as Kyango is concerned his continued existence after his death is tied up with and dependent upon his activities and work for his *bajjajja*, and furthermore that this is something he values and is concerned about. This mirrors Kayteshi's concern to secure her resurrection to *ensi empya* through her proselytising and her obedience to God. In each case, securing an afterlife is reliant upon behaving appropriately in life.

Helping others

Kyango's switch to his new practices is ostensibly concerned with helping others. He told me during our first meeting about how much helping others means to him, explaining that it allows him to feel peace in his heart. On the same occasion, he went on to tell me about his decade-long involvement with various charitable organisations. In one of these roles, he provided advice to AIDS sufferers on antiretroviral therapy; in another, training on the relative benefits of planting different tree species. These were voluntary roles, for which he just received from time to time a *kasiimo* – a gratuity or something small to show appreciation. An additional motivation he described is that, while helping others may not benefit you directly, your relatives at some point may come across someone you helped and benefit from this. This reflects an ideal of a sort of generalised reciprocity evident in numerous Ganda proverbs, such as the warning, *Gwossussa emwanyi – omusanga kunyanja ngayawungula* (The person you skip when handing out hospitality coffee beans is the one you find manning boats at a river crossing) (Kizza 2010: 80). He told me that most people do not want to do these kinds of roles, because they want immediate rewards, rather the uncertain future rewards of a *kasiimo*.

This led him to tell me of a cooperative organisation he set up around the year 2000 called 'Ladies and Gentlemen help us, Bukula Farmers' Group'. A number of villagers joined the cooperative, but without seeing immediate rewards membership rapidly dwindled. At this point, I mentioned to Kyango my observation that different

homesteads seem to work together very rarely, an observation he agreed with. He explained that in the past there were communal compulsory work projects (*bulungi bwansi*) organised by the administrative bodies of the Buganda Kingdom, usually at the village level. Each household was required to provide one man for community projects such as building and maintaining roads. These stopped with the expulsion of *Kabaka Muteesa II* in 1966. Kyango lamented the loss of these projects as they had really benefited the community. It can be seen from this that Kyango values helping others and his new role as a *musawo* is an opportunity for him to do so, while he also values people coming together for their mutual benefit. However, the public service Kyango is able to perform through his new work is not limited to healing practices.

Culture and tradition

Obbo notes that traditional healers' roles in Buganda go beyond simply providing medicine and that 'they are also teachers and interpreters of values and beliefs' (1996: 198). Kyango seemed to have a similar concern. On the day described above when I first met his *jjajja*, Kyango reiterated a number of times that what they were doing was '*eby'obuwangwa*'. This can be translated as 'cultural things'. *Buwangwa* relates to the term *ggwanga* meaning 'tribe' or 'nation'. Obbo describes *eby'obuwangwa* as 'the sum of all the observances that distinguish the Baganda from other groups' (in a comment replying to Karlström 2004: 613). It had been evident from prior discussions with Kyango that Ganda culture was extremely important to him. The posters in his front room are an example of this interest. When I noted these and asked Kyango which clan he belonged to he went to his room and brought out a framed image for '*omuziro gwaffe*' (our totem) and explained his is the *kasimba* (genet cat) clan.

He is also an avid reader of *Entanda ya Buganda* – a magazine produced by the Buganda kingdom which contains items concerning Buganda history, clans, and important sites, as well as the lyrics of the Ganda anthem and features such as proverbs and idioms. 'An *ntanda*', Kyango explained, 'is something someone gives you to benefit you... like if someone gives you money to pay for your transport. The magazine

is meant to benefit the Baganda, teaching them about their kingdom.’ Kyango would purchase each new issue soon after its release and his enthusiasm was so great that he had told others in the village he planned to enter the annual *Entanda* competition run by CBS radio, the Buganda kingdom’s own radio station. This competition tests participants’ ‘cultural’ knowledge and culminates in a showdown of the finalists at the New Year’s Eve celebrations at *Lubiri*, the former royal palace in Kampala, during a huge event attended by thousands and featuring an array of Uganda’s top musical talent.



Figure 6-2: Kyango outside his house

The respect Kyango accords to ‘culture’ or ‘tradition’ is important and it is evident that he feels strongly about maintaining the knowledge and practices of Buganda. A vocational shift that allows Kyango to devote himself full-time to propagating and perpetuating traditional Ganda knowledge and practice is something he values. However, this vocational shift is also premised on more personal motives as we shall see in the following section.

Wealth and material gain

The changes in Kyango's life are not only concerned with helping others and ensuring the continuity of his self after his death. He also sees more immediate personal benefits. His *bajjajja* have told him that treating patients will be his means of earning a living, as patients must pay for his services, and that he should begin selling his carpentry tools. They have told him that he will become a *mugagga* (wealthy person), that he will get a car, and that he will be so busy that before he has finished a consultation with one person another will arrive to see him. Kyango is clearly delighted with this possibility. He envisioned a scene after getting a car in which he would drive it home, through Kiti and Bukula, and as he passed by people would ask each other, 'Is that Kyango?', to which others would reply, 'No, it can't be – Kyango is always on a bike'. He told me that when I return to Uganda in the future his compound would be very different and much more 'developed'.

It is important to note here the possibility that Kyango's new role may be something of a pretence and is more simply about making money and a reputation. People in the village are very cognisant that many *basawo baganda* are frauds, although almost all agree that there are those who are genuine. As Kyango was only just beginning to treat patients when I left the field, people were still unsure on the authenticity of his mediation with his ancestors and his abilities as a *musawo*.

Another way in which Kyango's relationship with his *bajjajja* allows him to benefit directly is through the ability to displace requests for things onto these ancestors, and to play on the reluctance of people to upset them. This happened to me on one of my meetings with Kyango's *jjajja* when the *jjajja* requested me to bring money on my next visit for Kyango to have a beer. It becomes more difficult to refuse when asked by the *jjajja* than would be the case had Kyango asked directly.

While Kyango was very clear that he was keen to acquire this material wealth, when I asked him how to explain *bugagga* (wealth) he said:

Most people know that it is things... a car... etc... But wealth – most importantly it is people. If you do not have people then you cannot have wealth.

He went on to say that having things brings respect, but only if you attain them in a ‘good’ way and that you are not the only person who benefits from them. In the next section, I take a closer look at the social benefits, such as respect, that Kyango may expect to get through his new role.

Respect

A further benefit for Kyango arising from his transformation could be an improvement in his social standing in the area. We have seen throughout this thesis the value of securing the respect (*kitiibwa*) of others. As an elder and as a father, Kyango would be afforded a strong degree of respect from others in the community. His abilities as a *musawo* will accord him greater respect from many, especially if he can prove himself to be effective. Prior to Lukanika, Kyango was elected as the Bukula village (LC1) chairman, suggesting that at this point he was well respected in the community. The role of chairman is an elected post and so typically results in a popular, fair, and respected chair and Lukanika as the incumbent is widely seen to fill these criteria. However, I did not get the impression that Kyango was particularly well respected any more. One villager told me that Kyango becomes very angry with anyone taking fruit from his garden, and even refuses those who ask. In addition, there were some question marks over Kyango’s conduct during his chairmanship. An elderly neighbour of Kyango’s told me that the organisation that constructed his house came to him, as chairman, to ask which family in his jurisdiction was most deserving of a house and he suggested that it was himself. Another neighbour complained that during a time of drought, Kyango had been responsible for distributing beans and flour donated by the government to households in Bukula, but that he only distributed half and sold the remainder for his own gain. Whether these claims are true is less important than the sentiments towards Kyango that they express. It could be that Kyango sees his new role as an opportunity to regain some of this lost respect.

A second way Kyango’s social standing may increase is through his specialist knowledge. He talked at length about the importance of the knowledge he gets from

his relationships with the *bajjajja*. As I have mentioned, he recognises that he does not actually have this knowledge himself; rather he is a channel or a conduit for their knowledge. Even so, he feels he is learning a lot from his ancestors about Ganda ‘cultural’ matters, and his pride in his knowledge of these things was evident in my earlier discussion. While specialist knowledge may give Kyango an internal feeling of his life having some value, it only gains real social significance when it is valued by others. Kyango’s knowledge, or rather his ability to channel the knowledge of his *bajjajja*, is valued by or is of use to others in his clan and in his neighbourhood. (Although it is perhaps more accurate to say that this knowledge is currently *potentially* valued as it will depend on how effective he proves to be as a *musawo*.) However, the value of this knowledge is intrinsic as well as utilitarian. In his classic study of equatorial Africa, Jan Vansina notes that ‘knowledge for knowledge’s sake was an essential ingredient’ of social life (1990: 255). I would suggest that it is similar here, and simply by virtue of his (access to) knowledge, Kyango is likely to increase his respect.

Choice or obligation?

Up until this point, I have largely looked at Kyango’s transformation from the point of view of it being a choice he has made. But to what extent is this the case? Some of Kyango’s comments suggest otherwise:

They [the *bajjajja*] came and told me they wanted me. Our *kika* [clan] is big. They said they have chosen me to help my *kika*, and other people.

If someone comes to me for help, then I have to stop what I am doing, and come here and call to them [the *bajjajja*], so they can help find out what is wrong with that person. If I refuse to do that then I can get some problems.

However, while this suggests that Kyango did not choose his new way of life, it remains necessary that the individual the ancestors select be open to doing so, and the fact that Kyango engaged in ‘research’ over a number of years demonstrates his willingness to take on this role. Furthermore, this nexus between choosing and being selected speaks to a wider context of self-interest and social obligations and

expectations. It is clear that Kyango is relishing these changes in his life. He appears to value greatly his developing relationships with his *bajjajja*, and he sees it as a means of improving his own circumstances or *embeera*. At the same time, individuals who have the ability to help others are expected to do so. Wealthy individuals, for example, face an expectation to assist other clan members when in need. It is, therefore, a combination of social expectations, spiritual imperatives, and personal interest, motivated by a mix of material, spiritual, social, and personal gain.

CONTINUITY AND CONNECTEDNESS

What the foregoing discussion should demonstrate is that many interrelated factors are implicated in the dramatic change in Kyango's life. In this section, I argue that much of the background to the transformation can be seen in terms of a desire for both continuity and social connectedness.

I see 'continuity' as relating to something or someone continuing through time and Kyango talks about a number of aspects of continuity in relation to this change. The first relates to his own continuation after his death as a *muzimu*, something that he believes necessitates his new activities, particularly given his scepticism of Catholic ideas of the afterlife. Kyango believes that he must cultivate his relationship with his ancestors and must work together with and for them in order to secure his own continuity. He described to me how he now has 'a mind that stretches far back' through his ancestors, but that after his death and return as a spirit he will be able to select someone younger and stronger to carry on his work in this world. This links to a second aspect of continuity – that of continuing the work or activities that Kyango is currently performing. It is partially a continuation of what might be considered Kyango's legacy, but also the reproduction of traditional or 'cultural' practices (*eby'obuwangwa*). The continuation of these activities is, in turn, necessary for the care of the ancestors, whom Kyango will one day join. Obbo says that 'the discourse of healing is concerned with preserving the past and ensuring a present and a future' (1996: 187).

Intertwined with the theme of continuity is that of social connectedness, which I see as pertaining to present links between people, both living and dead. We see this in Kyango's concern to develop and maintain his relationships with his ancestors, but also in his purported desire to help others and the wish to improve his standing in the community. These themes of continuity and connectedness are evident throughout the community. An interesting comparison is Auerbach's (2012) study of a coffee cooperative in Eastern Uganda. Auerbach critiques standard ideas of individual economic rationality and demonstrates the wellbeing resulting from the strength of community and social connectedness in the community. She argues that this connectedness is valued in itself, not merely instrumentally as a route to increasing welfare.

Succession

After a person's death in Buganda, a key aspect of succession is the installation of a *musika* (heir or successor). This individual takes the place of the deceased in the clan hierarchy and is sometimes said to 'inherit your blood' (Madina). In theory, all Baganda should be succeeded by a *musika*, but it seems to be especially important for men, due to the patrilineal clan system of the kingdom. Because of this, most say that the *musika* for a woman will come from her brother's children, rather than her own, in order to keep the heir in the same clan. When a man dies, it is usually a son, although not necessarily the first-born, who becomes the *musika* and who then serves to symbolically represent his father. He is now often referred to as *Taata* (father) by his siblings, and becomes the de facto head of the family. Being succeeded is a practice that is important for the continuity both of the deceased and of their lineage.

The ceremony of installing this heir, the *kwabya lumbe* (often simply referred to as the *lumbe*), usually takes place some weeks or months after the death, and in some cases even years later (although the first *lumbe* I witnessed was held immediately following the burial). The *kwabya lumbe* is a particularly important occasion as it effectively serves to legitimise the life of the deceased. As Karlström explains, 'Not to

be succeeded in this way is the ultimate dishonor – proof of a squandered and meaningless life’ (2004: 598). This contention was perceptible in my fieldwork and this can perhaps best be seen in the consequences for *not* performing the ceremony. For example, when I asked Madina what happens if you do not have a *lumbe* she told me, ‘Trouble [*nnaku*], very much trouble. You cannot die and not have a *lumbe*. If you do not have a *lumbe*, how can you have a *musika*?’ ‘What happens if your people fail to organise a *lumbe* and you have no *musika*?’, I probed. ‘The one who died has to send messages to family members in their dreams, asking why they do not have a *lumbe*’. At this point Moses interjected, ‘The deceased can do something very bad, to show that they are not happy. They will kill someone’. When I expressed my shock, Moses did not translate but simply asked Madina what the deceased can do, to which she replied, ‘They can kill them, or make them sick’. This is one example of the *muzimu* of the deceased returning to disturb their living relatives. It seems clear that being given a *musika* is important from the point of view of the deceased.

A worthless life?

There are certain individuals who are not considered to be deserving of a *musika* and the reasons for this are revealing. From my discussions with people in the villages two such reasons stand out, both of which speak to the fundamental importance of the social weal (a term Jackson (2011) uses in his wellbeing research in Sierra Leone).

Firstly, a *lumbe* is typically not held, and the deceased is therefore not given a *musika*, if an individual has not had children (although opinion differed on this and Kyango said they do receive a *musika*, usually a brother’s child). Mpagi explained, ‘We don’t do it. It is good to not do it because that person has not left anything – any son or daughter’. Similarly, Charles, a brother of Ziwa, told me at a family gathering, ‘It is very bad not to have children. You will not get a *lumbe*’. Steven, Ziwa’s son, was with us at the time and elaborated on the lack of respect for such a person: ‘In the past, if you died with no children then they could just remove you from the house through a window... you did not get to leave the house through the door’. We have seen

throughout this thesis the importance of having children, and this is another reason for it. Having children is vitally important for the continuity of the clan or the kingdom, a notion succinctly encapsulated in the proverb, *Ekitezaala – tekyaalala* (A species that does not replicate cannot increase its population) (Kizza 2010: 65).

A second reason for not conducting a *lumbe* is following a hanging. We saw in the last chapter how hanging can bring misfortune (*kisiraani*) on those remaining alive and the contempt with which the corpse is dealt. Committing suicide by hanging is considered worse than through other methods, such as poisoning, because of the impact it has on the relatives and others nearby. Kyango told me, ‘With poisoning, people cannot follow this... cannot do the same. But with a hanging other people can copy’. The particular disapproval for hanging is evident as, according to Kyango and Moses, a person who commits suicide by poisoning is granted a *musika* while one who does so by hanging is not. A number of years ago, Kyango’s brother hanged himself. This man had himself been installed as the *musika* for their father but, as Kyango explained, ‘He was not given a *musika*. Instead we had another small ceremony and another brother was made the heir to my father’.

To recapitulate, not being given a *lumbe*, and consequently not having an heir, is a dishonour arising from what can be seen as a worthless life. What the two reasons I have presented for this occurring have in common, I argue, is that they are fundamentally anti-social because they work against the social weal and against the continuity of the lineage and by extension of the kingdom. As Karlström says, ‘The *kwabya lumbe* ceremony effects a restoration of social continuity and moral order in the face of death’ (2004: 598). I remarked above on the misfortune hanging brings to the family, and Sowedi, Moses’ grandfather, told me the same thing about not having children: ‘It is *kisiraani*. You have brought *kisiraani* to the family’. In a striking reflection of Kyango’s assertion of hanging setting an example for others, Sowedi continued, ‘People want their families to continue forever. If one person were to choose not to have children then others in the family could follow their example’. Therefore, if we accept, as Karlström suggests, that the denial of a *lumbe* reflects a life

squandered, then it follows that the value of a life is rooted in sociality and the common weal.

In addition, rituals such as the *lumbe* offer opportunities for clan members to meet. While I have argued for its importance for the continuity and legitimation of the life of the deceased, and of its role in reproducing the social structure, of arguably greater import to the attendees of the ceremony is the opportunity for people, in particular clan members, to meet and get to know one another (Karlström 2004: 599). The largest *lumbe* I attended was that of a good friend from Kampala who was being installed as his father's *musika* in a village only an hour from Nabikakala. While there, I met a mutual friend who took time before the event to explain the ceremony to me. He told me that the opportunity for *okumanyagana*, or 'getting to know one another', was very important, a sentiment which was reiterated by the priest leading the ceremony.

Property

The significance of succession goes beyond the installation of a *musika*. While the *musika* is the official heir, this does not necessarily correlate with the inheritance of properties and wealth, which may be distributed among a number of family members. It is desirable to keep your possessions in the immediate family. As Mpagi said, 'You don't feel well when your things are being taken by another family, even your brother'. This is one reason it is preferable to have children, otherwise your possessions will be inherited most likely by a brother or his son. It is important that your efforts in life and the rewards they have ideally yielded, such as for example a developed plot of land, continue to be of use after your death. The work you do in life is not only for your own benefit, but transcends your lifespan to provide some continuity in the coming generations. Madina told me that if a man does not have a son, then a daughter can potentially inherit the property. When I asked Kyango about this, he explained that in the past this would never have happened but that in present times it is possible. However, he also noted that this creates problems because when she dies and her

children inherit her property then it will be lost to the clan. If a person's properties are not dealt with and looked after as they would wish following their death, their *muzimu* might become annoyed and make this known through dreams or through a medium. Mpagi explained that one of the key roles of the *musika* is to 'to keep the properties safe'.

We can see from the above discussion how the continuation of a person is rooted in the social. This is further exemplified in practices of memory and naming.

Naming and remembering

Okuzaala kwekuzuukira

Producing [children] makes one immortal/is resurrection
(Common Ganda proverb)

One of the key functions the installation of a *musika* performs is that it allows the deceased to be 'resurrected'. Steven, the son of Ziwa, captured it succinctly when he told me in English that having a *musika* 'is really important for continuation. You continue in your children. People can say that the child is like the parent'. This resurrection is metaphorical as the deceased is not actually resurrected but rather is seen to live on in their children, and the existence of the *muzimu* further attests to this. Even when children are given the name of a deceased relative (something I will discuss shortly), no one claims that this actually *is* that person. Kyango explained why children are so crucial to living on:

If you die when you have failed to produce [children], then people can forget your name because they have nothing by which to remember you. If you produce and your child resembles you, then the people still alive who see the child can say, 'eh, this child looks just like the father'. People can see the child and they remember you, as if you are still alive. It seems as if you have not died for good.

These final two sentences allude to the primary reason being remembered is so important; it is a way to continue your existence. A further way of ensuring the deceased are remembered is through the process of naming. Kyango went on to say:

If you produce a child and he looks like his grandfather, then you can choose to name the child after the grandfather. Then, if someone calls, 'John, you come', when the people see him, they can say he is just like the old John. This

is very good.

While most children are given a Christian or Muslim name, each also receives a clan name, or at times more than one. Most of these names are unique to the clan (with the exception of a few cross-clan names) and therefore immediately serve to allow individuals to identify members of their own clan. This clan name is typically chosen by the paternal grandfather or, at times, another senior figure in the immediate lineage and it is a carefully considered decision. As Nyombi, a son of Ziwa, explained to me, the reason this is an elderly clan member is because they know more about the ancestors who have gone before and which names to avoid (see also Nsimbi 1980: 7). For example, if there were many men called Nyombi who were thieves then they would not use this name.

Although not always the case, children are sometimes named after a specific relative, often one recently deceased. I came across numerous instances of this, such as Madina's grandchild being named after her deceased husband or Mpagi's son being called 'Muzeeyi', the honorific used for an elder. Mpagi's son was given the full name of Mpagi's deceased father and was therefore accorded this same honorific. At first, it seemed bizarre to me that a boy of around five years old was being called 'old man' but, as Mpagi explained, 'This is the way of respecting my father's name'. Being given a *musika*, he later told me, 'keeps your name from being forgotten by other family members'. Kyango nicely described the importance of the continuation of one's name:

There was a man who started a car company. His name was Mercedes-Benz, and he decided to name his company with his name. He started the company many years ago but the name is still continuing. That is the value of having children. The more children you produce, the more your name can continue.

It is considered very important that the young are aware of where they come from. Mpagi once told me that when his nephew's children come to visit he always tells them, 'I am Mpagi. I am your father, but I succeeded your grandfather, who was called Kalanze'. He went on to say, 'We want those young ones to know their roots, from our ancestors'. The valuing of temporal continuity through the clan is further in evidence, as Kyango reminded me, in the important practice of *okulanya* (Kodesh 2010: 12;

Mubiru 2012: 91, footnote 23), in which a person's line of descent is listed, going back generations: 'a produced b; b produced c; c produced d...'.

A further example of the importance of continuity and connectedness is the practice of burying the dead in the *kiggwa* (pl. *biggwa*), the family burial ground. Whenever a family member dies, they are buried in this *kiggwa* alongside their close kin. Some *biggwa* go back generations, although in practice, due to migration, many have a more limited time-scale. As Shaban explained to me, the *kiggwa* is important 'so that you can remember that so-and-so was buried here'. It serves as a way to remember the deceased, but also allows for a sense of continuity and association to one's ancestors, as the *mizimu* of the deceased are commonly believed to inhabit the space surrounding the *kiggwa*. When a person is not buried in the *kiggwa*, this is another instance in which the *muzimu* can become annoyed and cause trouble among the family (Okello and Musisi 2006: 67).

Control over land is therefore important as people want to keep their *biggwa* in the family (Hanson 2003: 31–4). Kyango's father and a number of other ancestors and siblings were buried in another part of Bukula, where Kyango grew up. This land was a *kibanja* that the landowner decided to sell, forcing Kyango's family to leave. He expressed the benefits of having your own *mailo* land so you can retain greater control over where family members are buried.

The connection with the ancestors at a *kiggwa* is not simply metaphorical but remains social, as this is where people can most effectively interact with their ancestors (Kodesh 2010). Kyango maintains a relationship with his *bajjajja* and explained that at times they just converse together: 'Sometimes at night, after sleeping for some time, I may start to discuss with my *bajjajja*. People maybe cannot believe that, but it is true'. Moreover, this relationship must be carefully cultivated. Kyango must do their bidding, but also must give them offerings:

The main reason I bring alcohol home here is for what you have seen. My *bajjajja* come to the earth [*bajja mu ensi*] and they drink alcohol. If I haven't brought alcohol here, and a *jjajja* comes, then he asks for alcohol. They do not want food after they die. There is no *muzimu* that eats food, but they really like

alcohol. Therefore, I bring alcohol home, and I also drink, but mostly when we are here in conversation.

A MEANINGFUL LIFE?

Before concluding, I want to return to Kyango. At the outset of my fieldwork I intended to investigate ideas around meaning in life, as studies in social psychology have consistently suggested that feelings of meaning or purpose in life positively correlate with wellbeing (Ryff 1989; Seligman 2011; Steger and Kashdan 2007; Steger, Oishi, and Kesebir 2011). However, I quickly discovered that the concept of a life having ‘meaning’ or ‘purpose’ made little sense to my interlocutors, and on one occasion I appeared to mildly anger an elderly man when attempting to ask him about the ‘purpose’ of his life. Nonetheless, I believe that from the above discussion we can see that Kyango is concerned with being part of something greater than himself. It is evident that there remains, at least for Kyango, some sense that a life, or an individual, can be worthwhile or useful.

One approach I find helpful within anthropology is Mathews’ (1996, 2006, 2009) appropriation of the Japanese concept of the *ikigai*. The *ikigai*, Mathews tells us, denotes ‘that which makes one’s life seem worth living’ (1996: 5). It is ‘that element of one’s social world that enables one to experience well-being’ (2009: 169) and, furthermore, is ‘one’s deepest bond to one’s social world’ (2009: 173). His research was based on numerous in-depth interviews and sought to understand the *ikigai* of his interviewees, which may be, for example, their work, family, religious belief, or a creative endeavour (2006: 155). While such a term seems to appear only in Japanese, Mathews argues that it is a cross-culturally valid concept. He explains it thus:

As the products of culturally and personally shaped fate, selves strategically formulate and interpret their *ikigai* from an array of cultural conceptions, negotiate these *ikigai* within their circles of immediate others, and pursue their *ikigai* as channeled by their society’s institutional structures so as to attain and maintain a sense of the personal significance of their lives. (1996: 49–50)

I contend that Kyango’s new vocation could be seen as his *ikigai*. The meaning that derives from this pursuit is profoundly social and, indeed, it cannot be otherwise.

For Kyango and, I would argue, others in the villages, the sense that one's life is worthwhile must come from without. Or rather, a life can only be valued in relation to others (including the ancestors) and can only be legitimated by others – producing offspring being a case in point.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have taken as a starting point Kyango's shift from his work as a carpenter to beginning a role as a *musawo muganda*, or a local healer, and I went on to explore the reasons underlying this transformation. Kyango was not compelled to make this change and it contained a large element of risk, as he may not be successful. If we assume that making such a significant change to his life was premised on a belief that it would make his life better, then examining this 'vital conjuncture' ought to be able to provide insight into what, for Kyango at this point in his life, it means to live well. While there are clear potential short-term benefits in terms of wealth, social status, and satisfaction there are also longer-term concerns with a view to his own afterlife and the continuation of Ganda tradition and social structures. These latter, I argue, reflect a wider concern in the villages with both personal and social continuity as well as feelings of social connectedness with those both living and dead.

I have intended to demonstrate in this chapter that people in Nabikakala and Bukula are actively involved in shaping the course of their lives and seeking to live well. The decisions they take in this process embody a multitude of different considerations and the outcomes of these decisions are often unforeseeable. But, people try. The example of Kyango's change is useful as it epitomises the decisions people in Nabikakala and Bukula make on a daily basis. In addition, however, one needs to be open to opportunity. If Kyango had not met the man who 'showed him the light', is unlikely he would have further developed his relationship with his *bajjajja* and given up his carpentry workshop. Efforts to live well are a combination of this opportunity and trying different paths.

Chapter 7 - LIVING WELL, DYING WELL, AND THE PURSUIT OF A GOOD LIFE

Six months after I left Nabikakala, my Ugandan ‘father’, Muzeeyi Ziwa, passed away. He had been very ill throughout my fieldwork and his death did not come as a great surprise. Ziwa had lived a long life – he was almost 90 – and had been a civil servant prior to moving his family to Nabikakala in the early 1980s. He had even spent one or two years in the UK with the Ugandan diplomatic service. I kept hearing snippets of his past from his many offspring and I was keen to spend some time during my fieldwork listening to and recording his life story. This proved difficult however as his illness kept him bed-ridden for much of my time living with him and Kobusingye, and his poor hearing made any discussions we did have quite laborious. Ziwa’s death felt almost unreal, now being so far away from daily life in the village. And it felt wrong to miss not only the burial but also the last funeral rites (the *lumbe*) a year or so later. I imagined what people who knew him might say about Ziwa – how they would evaluate his life – and I was reminded of conversations through the course of my fieldwork about the concept of a ‘good death’. I took some comfort from the fact that most would likely say Ziwa had died well. He had left many children and had left them with a relatively good *embeera*, particularly thanks to his and Kobusingye’s efforts to educate them.

In his book *Social Happiness: Theory into Policy and Practice*, Thin claims that ‘the most telling happiness query is not “how are you?” but rather the “deathbed test” thought experiment’ (2012b: 27). Thin argues that asking our interlocutors to imagine reflecting on their lives from their deathbeds encourages them to consider and talk about their lives as a whole. In attempting to recreate this thought experiment, Moses and I struggled to find an effective way in Luganda of asking people to imagine a future-self reflecting on the past. Instead, we found that the concept of a ‘good death’ or ‘dying well’ (*okufa obulungi*) proved useful. I originally came across this concept while listening to the radio with Mpagi and hearing him say of a deceased politician,

‘afudde bulungi’ (he has died well). While the topic of death arose commonly in conversations with my interlocutors, the notion of *okufa obulungi* was one I usually had to explicitly raise, though which people had little difficulty discussing. The previous five chapters focus on diverse individuals with at times very differing aspirations and desires, but I found my variation on the deathbed thought experiment was a way to analytically bring together these disparate lives, as well as the lives of others in the community.

A GOOD DEATH

To die well means having grandchildren to carry you to your grave
(Matovu, July 2013)

This quote from Matovu, an elderly resident of Bukula originally from Burundi, encapsulates the sentiments of most of those I asked about what it means to die well – sentiments overwhelmingly indicating the importance of the social. Others explained that a good death requires ‘having your people’, ‘having your children’, or ‘when you have produced children’. However, it goes further than this, in that to die well really means leaving your people in a good situation, with *embeera ennungi*. As Mpagi explained the first time I heard the phrase *‘afudde bulungi’* (he has died well), the politician he was referring to had gained wealth and therefore prepared well for his family. These feelings were reflected by Shaban: ‘you do not have to be rich, but to have *embeera ennungi*’. Segawa, a tall powerful man in Bukula in his mid-thirties, told me that ‘it is not good if you die and your children worry about how they will eat’, and his mother, Namubiru, said that dying well is about ‘knowing that your children and grandchildren will be okay... when everything is sorted and you can die relaxed’. Dying well clearly means that you leave those for whom you have some responsibility in as good a situation (*embeera*) as you can. Matovu expanded on this, saying that it is not enough to leave your children just with land or cattle, for example, but that you should educate them. Whereas property might be sold-off and they be left with nothing, with education, he argued, ‘they can build their own futures’.

There is a striking consistency in the ways my interlocutors talked about what constitutes dying well – primarily reproduction and, ideally, attaining *embeera ennungi* so that those left behind can live well. This brings us full circle back to the importance of *embeera ennungi*. In Chapter 1, I described this in quite tangible terms – having wealth, land, and people. However, its importance clearly goes beyond this to incorporate more transcendental concerns. Achieving *embeera ennungi* allows a person to die content in the knowledge that they have done well by their family, and have died a good person.

Similar themes arise, unsurprisingly, if we consider what might constitute a bad death. We have already seen the disapproval for those who die without having had children and particularly for those who hang themselves. In both cases, I suggested the diminished respect for the deceased is due to their lack of concern for the social weal. Similarly, at times I asked my interlocutors whether it is good for a person to die when they are happy and feel their life is good but others do not like them. Yusuf, my close neighbour in Nabikakala, said that other people will therefore not like this person's children, and so it is therefore bad to die unliked. Sowedu echoed this, saying that it is not good to die happy but unrespected.

These aspects of a good death are clearly moral considerations in that they are concerned with being a good person. Nevertheless, as Madina points out, there are other, more pragmatic, facets of dying well. She explained that one significance of having 'your people' is to look after you when you are old and infirm; without this, she said, 'then you have died badly'. We might also consider the preparations for an afterlife that I discussed in chapters 4 and 6. Finally, the manner of one's death is also important. When I asked whether there were ways to 'die badly', many people suggested that dying in an accident, or being murdered would be bad. Mpagi said that it is better to die 'at once, without suffering'.

I raise the concept of a good death as I believe it greatly helps us to understand what it means to live well in Nabikakala and Bukula. Ernest Becker (1973) argues that the human world is largely shaped by our 'denial of death' and our desire for symbolic

immortality. As Peter Metcalfe and Richard Huntington say:

The moment of death is related not only to the process of afterlife, but also to the process of living, aging, and producing progeny. Death relates to life: to the recent life of the deceased, and to the life he or she has procreated and now leaves behind. (1991: 108)

So, while my interlocutors talk here of dying well, their evaluations are more concerned with whether people have lived well, rather than the manner of their dying. However, death, being an event in everyone's life, serves as an analytical lens allowing us to compare diverse lives, and thus to shift the focus of the thesis from the primarily individual level to the people of Nabikakala and Bukula more generally. The idea of a 'good death' raises a number of important questions about evaluating life in the villages that I seek to address in this chapter. As Thin points out, the 'deathbed test' offers a life span perspective, allowing our interlocutors to consider the value of their life as a whole. This leads to two questions: How do people in Nabikakala and Bukula conceive of (a) life? And, when they are evaluating their lives, do they focus more on present circumstances or do they have an idea of their life as a story or a journey?

In this chapter, I take the notion of a good death as a starting point to explore more deeply the pursuit of a good life in Nabikakala and Bukula, in an attempt to go further beyond the individual lives of the previous five chapters. In the following section, I address the questions laid out above and then use my conclusions from this discussion to discuss the ways in which villagers negotiate their attempts to live well. I consider how they deal with a multiplicity of, at times incompatible, desired goods; their capacity to pursue these; and finally the impact of social approval and disapproval on these efforts. From here, my discussion leads into an exploration of the tensions between individual and social wellbeing concerns and how people in the villages continually attempt to find a balance between these. In doing so, my aim in this chapter is to bring together a number of thematic threads from the thesis: morality and the social approval or disapproval of how one lives; the nexus between choice and constraint; and the relational nature of wellbeing.

EVALUATING LIFE

In this section, I want to take up two interrelated issues with the aim of moving towards a fuller understanding of what it means to evaluate life in the villages. Firstly, when people in Nabikakala and Bukula evaluate their lives, what exactly is it they are evaluating? A key component of this question is to consider how these people conceive of (a) life. Secondly, what temporal orientations are in evidence in the way people here evaluate life?

Conceiving of (a) life

In Chapter 1, I introduced the distinction between *embeera* and *obulamu*, settling on *embeera* as the key focus for understanding conceptions of living well in Nabikakala and Bukula primarily because I found it to be the most commonly stated ambition. I return to it now in light of Thin's suggestion that the deathbed test provides a way to look at the whole lives of our interlocutors. When my interlocutors talked about dying well, were they actually thinking of their lives as a whole? Their responses focused more on describing their *embeera* at their death. Does this therefore mean they primarily evaluate their lives in terms of the present?

Both these terms, *embeera* and *obulamu*, can be translated as 'life', and I have noted my struggles, and those of my interlocutors, to articulate the differences between the two. However, I have always felt there is something potentially enlightening in exploring this distinction. I believe the difficulty lies in the fact that in everyday life asking someone about their *embeera* or about their *obulamu* serves a virtually identical purpose – simply enquiring as to how their life is at the present time.

So what is the difference? A hint at the answer can be found in a largely unsuccessful line of questioning I attempted in which I asked people 'What is the most important thing in your life?' looking to gain some insight into the goods they valued highly, and potentially into some ideas of what gives life meaning. I discussed the wording of the question with Mpagi, and he explained that using the construction '*embeera yo*' for 'your life' would not make sense. Rather, I would have to ask about

‘*obulamu bwo*’. The difference between the two would equate to the difference between asking someone in English the most important thing in their ‘situation’ and in their ‘life’. The former would make little sense. Sometimes, when using *obulamu bwo*, responses appeared to be in line with how I had intended the question and included things such as God, children, partners, or money. However, very often people would answer by saying food, health, or farming. In these cases, my question seemed to be ‘misunderstood’ as being about what is important to keep you alive, understandable given that ‘*obulamu*’ also means ‘health’ and the stem ‘-lamu’ pertains to the state of being alive.

I found, then, that *embeera* pertains primarily to the present, whereas there is a sense that *obulamu* continues through time. Of course, one’s *embeera* is inevitably a product of past actions and events and one can clearly conceive of a future *embeera* that is better than the current one, or indeed hope their current level of *embeera* continues, but *embeera* itself does not have an inherent continuity. This is in fact not that different from someone at home in Scotland asking me ‘How is life?’ They do not take this to be an enquiry into how I evaluate my life in its entirety, but rather how it is going at the current time; in English, too, ‘life’ can denote either the whole life or the current situation.

We might therefore see *embeera* and *obulamu* as correlating with Strawson’s ideas of the episodic and diachronic self-experiences. For Strawson, an episodic person ‘does not figure oneself, considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future’, whereas a diachronic person does (2004: 430). However, as Kavedžija (2015: 150) has argued for her interlocutors in Japan, people can have both, and in Nabikakala and Bukula people see life as both *embeera* and *obulamu*.

Temporal orientations

In his concluding article to the recent *Hau* special issue on happiness and values, Robbins posits that there are two ‘temporalities of happiness’ evident in the articles in

the collection, one pertaining to ‘intense moments of experienced happiness’ and the other concerned with ‘people’s reckoning of their own or others’ happiness over long spans of time’ (2015: 216). Robbins notes philosopher Dan Haybron’s suggestion that philosophers have commonly approached happiness in the same two ways, as either ‘a state of mind’ or ‘a life that goes well for the person living it’ (Haybron 2011). How do these varying temporal orientations figure in the ways people in Nabikakala and Bukula evaluate their lives?

From what I have presented so far in this section, it would appear that people in the villages primarily evaluate their lives in the present. Even when we talk about a good death, where we might expect individuals to reflect on their lives as a whole, the prevailing responses of my interlocutors still tended towards an imagined future ‘present’. This does not mean that they live only in the present. As I have shown throughout this thesis, my interlocutors have plans or ideas for how they would like their lives to be and some conceptions of how they may try to get there. They have some kinds of imagined futures, albeit often ill-defined or uncertain. Similarly, individuals reflect on their past and how the course of their lives has progressed. I found this particularly with elderly people and it was, unfortunately, frequently predominantly negative. Mugema for example, Mpagi’s elderly neighbour, told me he felt that he had failed to prepare well for his old age because he had not succeeded in educating his children well enough. Munyalusoka, an old man in Bukula, likewise explained that he had tried to plan for his future but had failed. Nevertheless, this was not limited to older generations. Shaban and Moses were aware of the impact on their lives of their parents leaving the area when the boys were young and subsequently not paying for their continuing education. In addition, Mpagi talked about the consequences of his move to Bukula, explaining his desire to have stayed in Entebbe had he been able to afford a plot of land there.

I found the majority of my conversations with people in the villages tended towards the latter of Robbins’ and Haybron’s conceptions, towards thinking about how their lives are going or progressing. While my interlocutors do talk about *ssanyu*

(happiness), relating to Robbins' and Haybron's first temporal orientation, as something valued, enjoyed, and sought, it is seen as more ephemeral and figures less in the ways people talk about the quality of their lives. They talk about their *embeera* in the present, but do so in relation to what might be in the future. *Embeera* is an evaluation of life but also a motivation. The sense of process this engenders is one reason I have found a narrative, or life course, approach helpful in this research.

THE PURSUIT OF WELLBEING

I have taken as a premise for this research that most people in most contexts have ideas about how they can live better, and I have therefore taken the desire for wellbeing, or to live well, to be a key motivational factor in how people live their lives (see also Thin 2005: 20). Like Ahmed (2010), I believe it is helpful to look more closely at what wellbeing ('happiness' for Ahmed) *does* than to agonise over precisely what it is.

Ideas of a good death in Nabikakala and Bukula are remarkably consistent across the various religions, ethnic groups, genders, and generations. Given the salience of *embeera ennungi* in their responses, does this mean that the primary motivation for people is to pursue this? Is this what wellbeing *does* here? To an extent yes, however when we look in depth at everyday life, we find not only that ideas of how to get there are much less consistent or certain, but also that *embeera ennungi* is not the only valued good that orients how people live their lives. This, therefore, raises a key question implicit in the pursuit of a good life in the villages. While *embeera ennungi* is a desire, to what extent is it one upon which people act? To address this question it will be helpful to break it down into a number of sub-questions. Firstly, even though it is what people say they want in life, and also what they say is a major factor in being able to die well, what do they actually try to achieve in everyday life? Secondly, how effectively are people able to pursue and achieve the goods they seek? Or rather, how much agency or influence do they have over it? And, thirdly, closely linked to the last pair of questions, what ought they pursue, or not pursue? Leaving aside the question

of what other things they may be pursuing, to what extent are people in these villages free to pursue *embeera ennungi*? What ways of doing so are subject to social approval or disapproval?

Valued goods

Given the declared importance of the concept, it would be easy to imagine that people in Nabikakala and Bukula focus their efforts on pursuing *embeera ennungi*. However, one function of the in-depth look at the individuals in the preceding chapters, through portraying some of the lived realities of the tensions facing these people as they try to live well, has been to demonstrate that this is far from straightforward. Various goods are valued; some of those we have come across already include respect, wealth, health, security (both personal and of livelihood), pleasure and enjoyment, children, social connections, securing an afterlife, and continuity. Some of these valued goods may be compatible with *embeera ennungi* while others are less so.

That said, the multiplicity of valued goods is one reason *embeera ennungi* is such a powerful motivational idea – it offers synergies of different goods. The attainment of *embeera ennungi* enhances the ability to maintain a secure livelihood, potentially to access better healthcare, and likely to increase your respect within the community. It is important to offer a reminder that while I speak here of *embeera ennungi* as an absolute (i.e. either having it or not) in reality it is more of a continuum, and the closer you are to *embeera ennungi* the greater these collateral benefits. *Embeera ennungi* therefore incorporates, or rather it facilitates the pursuit of, a number of different valued goods, which in turn can help further improve your *embeera*. Nonetheless, even pursuing something as synergistic as *embeera ennungi* is complicated. While it is a good in and of itself, it is not a clearly defined concept and in fact comprises a number of other goods. Focusing on one may necessarily preclude or hinder attempts to attain other goods.

By means of an example let me return to and elaborate on a brief story I told in Chapter 3 concerning John Kiwanuka's purchase of a second-hand *piki-piki*. John had

worked hard and spent six years saving money for this purchase. He was clearly delighted with his new motorbike, despite the fact it had obviously seen better days. A couple of months later, Moses and I were chatting with him and I asked about his decision to buy the motorbike rather than elect to invest in something else. He explained that if a family member falls sick he can now take them immediately to the clinic, and that the increased mobility it gives him helps him find paid employment. I asked why he did not use the money to pay fees in better schools for his children, and he replied that this money would only help for one or maybe two years. The money would not be enough for them to complete their schooling, and he would not have his motorbike so, he argued, he would have achieved nothing.

At first this seemed strange to me. The children may not finish school with this money, but they would be further on, during which time John may somehow come into more money. However, in discussion with Moses the next day I came to appreciate John's choice. Sending his children to a better school and then in a year or two having to take them out of this school could have a detrimental effect, and ultimately this may greatly help neither him nor his children. At least with the *piki-piki* there was a definite, tangible gain that could feasibly improve his life and his ability to provide for the family. Numerous potential goods are tied up in this decision. Acquiring the *piki-piki* brings John greater respect and esteem from his peers; it raises the level of his *embeera* and in doing so improves his ability to pursue the life he desires; and it offers some security in terms of bringing quicker access to healthcare and wage labour. Furthermore, it brings him a sense of pride and accomplishment after his years of effort and, as he explained to me, it made his family very happy. On the other hand, this decision hindered the pursuit of other goods, such as the children's education, or other possibilities such as improving his house, continuing rearing livestock, or planting cash crops such as coffee.

There are always trade-offs to be made when seeking to live well. It is, probably, impossible to have all the goods one values or desires. Jackson points out a similar thing in his research in Sierra Leone, explaining that the Kuranko recognise that they

must often give up something to get something (2011: 150). But, as we see with John, individuals weigh up and attempt to maximise the synergies between the goods they can pursue.

Enablement/Opportunity

Let me now return to Muzeeyi Ziwa. He and his family were seen by many to be among the closest to having *embeera ennungi*. From conversations with Ziwa and Kobusingye, they were keen to emphasise the sacrifice and hard work it took them to achieve their *embeera*. However, while other villagers recognised this effort, there was also a feeling that they had a head start, as we saw earlier with Shaban's comment, 'Muzeeyi Ziwa had enough money... He was able to come here and buy that big land. How could a poor person do that?' This demonstrates the importance of enablement or opportunity in the pursuit of a good life. Shaban's comment suggests a belief that it is only through already having a certain level of *embeera* that you can have the resources to reach *embeera ennungi*.

So even when people in Nabikakala and Bukula know what they want to try to achieve, they are limited by their circumstances. In Chapter 1, I pointed out the almost paradoxical nature of *embeera ennungi* in that a key benefit it brings is an increased capacity to pursue desires and preferences, yet lacking *embeera ennungi* hampers the ability to make progress in these pursuits. In the first part of this section, I want to look at some of the key factors involved in enabling, or hindering, the pursuit of a good life in the villages. This leads me on, in the second part, to consider the degree of agency or influence my interlocutors feel they have over the course of their lives.

Resources and capabilities

Taken together, resources and capabilities are those things that allow or facilitate the pursuit of valued goods. Certain resources and capabilities may have intrinsic value (such as the pride a *piki-piki* can bring), but I am concerned here with their instrumental value. I see resources as those things people may have available to them, and capabilities as the things they are able to do. I find Veenhoven's (2000) matrix of the

‘four qualities of life’ helpful at this point (Table 7-1).

	<i>Outer qualities</i>	<i>Inner qualities</i>
<i>Life chances</i>	Livability of environment	Life-ability of the person
<i>Life results</i>	Utility of life	Appreciation of life

Table 7-1: Four qualities of life (Veenhoven 2000: 4)

Veenhoven explains ‘life chances’ as the ‘opportunities for a good life’, while ‘life results’ are ‘the good life itself’. The two can be seen as the ‘difference between potentiality and actuality’. Veenhoven describes ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ qualities as the external quality of the environment, and the internal quality of the individual (2000: 3). My primary concern in this section corresponds to Veenhoven’s notion of life chances. My ‘resources’ and ‘capabilities’ match his ‘livability’ and ‘life-ability’ quadrants. As such, I offer below (Table 7-2) an adaptation of the top half of Veenhoven’s matrix including examples drawn from my research in Nabikakala and Bukula.

	<i>Outer qualities</i>	<i>Inner qualities</i>
<i>Life chances</i>	<p>Livability of environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material – housing, money, tools, building materials, land, cooking/lighting fuel • Ecological – climate, soil fertility, seeds/cuttings • Transport – vehicle, roads • Social (positive) – support, labour, care, sharing knowledge, justice, security • Social (negative) – theft, sabotage, witchcraft • Spiritual/divine – <i>Mikisa</i> 	<p>Life-ability of the person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health • Knowledge • Skills • Character traits – determination, work-ethic, etc.

Table 7-2: ‘Life chances’ in Nabikakala and Bukula

These life chances are the factors affecting people's ability to pursue the valued goods they desire. They can be positive (enabling) or negative (hindering). However, even when these various life chances are enabling, does this mean that people in Nabikakala and Bukula can pursue the kinds of lives they desire?

Influence over the course of life

Throughout this thesis, I have attempted to demonstrate the agency or influence people in Nabikakala and Bukula have, or feel they have, over the course of their lives and their ability to pursue the kinds of lives they desire. Despite the enablement *embeera ennungi* brings, even someone with a very good *embeera* cannot live entirely as he or she would like. Rather than 'agency' James Laidlaw prefers the term 'freedom', arguing that 'Only actions contributing towards what the analyst sees as structurally significant count as instances of agency. Put most crudely, we only mark them down as agency when people's choices seem to us to be the right ones' (2002: 315). While Laidlaw's point is understandable, particularly so from his perspective advocating an anthropology of ethics, I nevertheless prefer 'agency' as, to me, it retains a sense of action. Rather than being passive entities at the mercy of their conditions and outside forces, people in the villages actively engage in trying to live well (reflecting other literature in East Africa (e.g. Abusharaf 2009; De Boeck 2004; Finnström 2008; James 2007; Weiss 2009)). They are trying, as Archambault explains for the young people in Mozambique with whom she worked, 'to live and not merely survive' (2013: 98). Nonetheless, villagers in Nabikakala and Bukula still live with restrictions on what it is possible to achieve.

The various protagonists in this thesis have frequently faced tensions between choice and various kinds of constraint. For example, Kyango becoming a *musawo* was part desire and part selection by the ancestors. He tells how he frequently has to stop his own tasks to do the bidding of the *bajjajja*. However, without his research, his probing, and his openness to learn more about engaging with his *bajjajja*, he would most likely remain a carpenter. Madina can choose how to use her land and can invest

labour in making it productive, but if the weather is poor or other people's cattle eat her crops, she can fare poorly. Kaytesa can make choices about the degree of reward deferral for her efforts, but uncertainty and lack of resources frequently constrain her to pursue more immediate goals than she would ideally like. Looking here at the influence individuals have leads us back to the life course and the attempts people make to live well. How much choice or agency do villagers in Nabikakala and Bukula actually have? Who or what governs the course a life takes?

Various scholars have written about ideas of destiny in West Africa, although less has been said about East Africa. Many have noted that in various cultural contexts a person's destiny is determined prior to birth. Robin Horton (1961) tells how, for the Kalabari of the Niger Delta, an aspect of an individual's personality, the *teme*, 'speaks' their destiny before birth, and he draws heavily on Fortes' work with the Tallensi who have similar ideas of 'speaking destiny'. Jackson (1988) offers various similar examples from other groups in the region, but notes that in his own research among the Kuranko there is no concept of a prenatal choice of destiny. Rather, an individual's destiny is seen to be a gift from Allah (p. 198). This resonates with Gaibazzi's work in Gambia where, for the Soninke, every individual has a personal destiny allotted to them by God (2015: 228).

While I did not find Luganda words for fate or destiny, and a dictionary search only offers explanations for the English terms rather than translations, there were hints during my fieldwork of similar ideas of life being at least to some extent preordained. For example, Kyango told me that he knows the date on which he will die – the *bajjajja* have told him. Moreover, Madina explained that wealth is frequently 'in the blood', that if you have poor parents and grandparents you will be very unlikely to get rich yourself. More commonly however, the discourse in my field site more closely reflected that of the Kuranko or Soninke in that the course of one's life depends on God's plan. Commonly when I asked people about their plans or what they thought might happen in the future they would say that only God can know.

Many of these other examples note how individuals must actively engage in

trying to find that which God has set out for them. Gaibazzi (2015) calls it ‘hustling’ or ‘questing’ for one’s luck or destiny. We have seen in this thesis the importance of work or otherwise making an effort to create luck, even if God is the ultimate arbiter of whether or not you succeed.

Jackson explains that the Kuranko do not act fatalistically. This is because destiny can never be known in advance and fortunes are bound-up with relations with other people, spirits, and God. Therefore, Jackson argues, in practice it is always human choice and action that determines the course of their destiny (1988: 199). In Nabikakala and Bukula it is similar. Even where people maintain that they are subject to God’s plan, they are nevertheless actively engaged in shaping their lives. The issue of birth control demonstrates this. Couples who struggle to conceive may take local herbs or may seek assistance from a *musawo*. When I asked people in the village whether this was morally good and suggested that difficulty in having children was perhaps just God’s plan, they told me that you do not know, and so you have to try.

Aside from destiny or the plans of God, individuals in the villages may also suffer reduced influence over their lives due to the actions of others. This may be from more powerful others wielding judicial or physical power over them or it may be through supernatural means, such as through the creation of a *jjembe* fetish. If, as suggested in Chapter 5, an individual creates a *jjembe* in order to entice customers to their store or taxi, does this equate to wielding control over their choices? However, as well as these more direct means of affecting the control individuals have over their ability to pursue the kind of life they desire, the social world has a more subtle effect in the shaping of aspirations and expectations and what pursuits and forms of a good life are socially approved. It is to this I now turn.

Approval

A further point arising from the idea of a good death is to consider who is evaluating the life. Imagining a good death involves not only thinking about how you would evaluate your own life but also considering how others would evaluate it. I noted at

the start of the chapter that I believe most people in the villages would deem Muzeeyi Ziwa to have died well – they would have approved of the situation, the *embeera*, in which he had been able to leave his family. These key elements of a good death, having progeny and leaving them in propitious circumstances, are socially desirable and socially approved goods. While individuals want these for their own existential comfort and because they care about the continuing wellbeing of their kin, there is also an element of concern for whether others approve of their lives, a concern important not only at the end of life but throughout the course of one's life and one's efforts to live well. It was rapidly apparent during my fieldwork that, unsurprisingly, certain ways of trying to live well result in disapproval, or are at best questionable. These may be things a person does or that they fail to do. For example, as we saw with Shaban, marrying and having children is expected of him, and failing to do so may result in disapproval. Madina went as far as to say that someone who does not produce children 'has no purpose' (*talina mugaso*).

The question of approval complicates the pursuit of a good life. On one hand, social approval is desirable, as living in a manner of which others approve can bring respect and acceptance, important elements of wellbeing in the villages. On the other, the necessity to consider how others will view your actions can hamper this pursuit. In other words, there are rewards from living as others would want you to, but there may also be rewards for not doing so. Furthermore, as should hopefully be clear from the earlier chapters, the moral evaluation of pursuits or ways of living is far from straightforward. For example, as we saw in Chapter 5 with Mpagi's confusion, the means by which people attempt to gain *mikisa* are subject to various moral evaluations. I offer here a further ethnographic example to demonstrate the significance of moral concerns around the ways people try to pursue a good life.

Habimana moved to Bukula a few weeks after I arrived although, as I soon discovered, he was actually returning after some time back home in Rwanda. A few of the villagers helped him construct a temporary shelter for his small family from arched branches, dried banana leaves, and two large tarpaulins. A few months later, they

moved into a house vacated by another Rwandan family who had moved to Lugalama. My first impression of Habimana was of a likeable, smiling, friendly man – Mpagi told me that he is always like that when he is drunk, and that he is usually drunk. A few weeks after meeting him, I was told that Habimana had a scheme whereby he brought young women from Rwanda and men in the area around Bukula paid to ‘take them as wives’. This was a story repeated to me by various people over the course of my fieldwork. Habimana would apparently tell the women in Rwanda that he could get them work in Uganda, bring them illegally over the border, and upon reaching Bukula would tell them that there was in fact no work and they would have to ‘marry’ local men (remembering that ‘marriage’ in Buganda can simply mean cohabitation without any formal ceremony). There were four or five of these women in Bukula and, I was told, many more in neighbouring villages. It was difficult for the women to refuse, having neither money nor documents to allow them to go back home to Rwanda, although I was told of two or three women who had protested and convinced Habimana and the men to whom they were given to pay for their return to Rwanda.

This scheme was Habimana’s primary means of subsistence, and was clearly one that caused harm to others – the women and their families back home. Nonetheless, Habimana’s behaviour was in general not causing any direct problems for the residents of the villages. In fact, many of them were quite clearly benefiting, particularly as various men over the course of my fieldwork told me there was a shortage of ‘suitable’ women in the area (in contrast to those telling me that there are many more women than men in Uganda, perhaps as a way to justify polygyny). This explains the apparent lack of enthusiasm for taking any action against him. Whereas a thief would be beaten and those caught allowing their cattle into others’ gardens required to pay compensation, the approaches towards Habimana seemed much more indirect. I was told that in the past the police had been informed about him but that he simply paid them off. Even though there appeared to be a consensus that what he was doing was morally not good, the fact that it was not causing harm to those in the area meant there was little inclination to take matters further and he was able to get away with it and be

accepted within the community.²⁷

I have suggested in this thesis that actions that are socially approved are those that further the social weal, or at least do not harm it. However, there are limits to this. Where efforts to live well do not negatively affect those nearby, but which may nevertheless harm others farther away, there seems to be a tacit acceptance of this. This is perhaps also the reason why people prefer to visit a *musawo* farther from home. These limits are social as well as spatial. There is less concern for potential harm to those more socially distant, evident for instance in the initial lack of disquiet over the welfare of the women brought by Habimana. On another occasion, a young man was believed to have sexually abused the maid living in their home, but when I asked Moses whether any action would be taken over this man he said it was unlikely because people would not want to anger the man's mother. The maid was sufficiently socially removed from the other villagers, being relatively new to the village and largely unknown and unrelated to any of the residents, that her suffering did not cause action to be taken against the young man.

Impression management

Because one's life is continually being evaluated by others in the community, people make efforts to mediate or manage how others can see them. When Shaban argued that Muzeeyi Ziwa, on his arrival in the area, had the resources to effectively educate his children and subsequently reap the rewards of doing so, I asked him about Ziwa's nickname, *bitoogo* (papyrus), after the poor-quality house they lived in for their first fifteen years in Nabikakala. Shaban exclaimed that even though people call him that they do not believe he was really that poor. He argued that if a person is able to buy a big piece of land how could it be that they could not afford to construct a better house? 'You cannot have money to buy a car but not to buy the tyres. You only do that if you

²⁷ I have been unsure whether to include this example in my thesis but, given that his activities were widely known in the community and by police, I have decided to include it. I have, however, changed his name.

are stupid. He [Ziwa] is a clever man'. He went on to tell me:

People do not want to show others if they are in a good life or bad life – they want to keep it a secret. There are many people like that – able to have *embeera ennungi* but staying with *embeera embi* [bad life]... even just walking bare foot though they have plenty money.

Madina also talked about impression management: 'Rich people do not want to show other people they are rich. They behave like poor people because they fear trouble. People can steal from you, or kill you because of your money'.

There is a tendency for people to attempt to conceal from others their real level of wealth or *embeera*. Ostentatiousness opens you up to jealousy, to potential theft, or to witchcraft. If a family appears too wealthy or too successful, they risk the jealousy of their neighbours or suspicion around how they achieved this success. That said, impression management is not straightforward, as appearing wealthy and successful can be beneficial for the respect, fear, and power it can bring. There are many clear indicators of relative affluence, such as cattle, new motorbikes, or plastered and cemented brick houses and, as we have seen with Shaban and with Kyango, many people desire to be relatively better off than others in the area are.

Impression management is not only important for the more affluent. An elderly Munyankole woman known in the village as Mulokole (as an adherent to the 'saved' movement, the *Balokole*) explained to me that it is not good to show other people your problems. For example, if you are punishing a child or fighting with a family member you should not do so in public. If you are fighting at home and a visitor comes then you tell them you are happy to see them and act as if there is no problem. She said, 'You always want to be happy with other people and then they can help you when you are in trouble. If you look miserable all the time then they may not'. By way of example, she explained that had she been quiet and sad on my first visit then I may not have come back, but because she was happy and talkative, she had received visitors and my gift of sugar. This example again demonstrates the importance of cultivating productive relationships.

This issue of impression management, or self-presentation, was evident

throughout my fieldwork. It amazed me, given the bubbling tensions, prevalent distrust, and pervasive jealousy in the villages that village relations were not more tempestuous. To be sure, frictions did boil over periodically but, in general, a veneer of harmony seemed to prevail. My contention is that this harmony is the result of a tacit agreement between village residents that this is necessary in order to enable the pursuit of wellbeing. A demonstration of this harmony, and a way in which it is reproduced, is the elaborate, formalised greeting ritual in Buganda. This consists of a back and forth thanking each other for their work, enquiring as to how the day is going, if things are calm/peaceful, and how the people are at home. While there will be some differences between the greeting of a much liked person you have not seen for some time and a neighbour you see every day, the neighbour is still accorded a full greeting when they visit your home. The greeting is conducted ideally when seated on a chair or a mat and is not necessarily the first dialogue to take place. Indeed, on one occasion I was rebuked for attempting to greet someone from my position standing in the doorway. It is common for people to make small talk before both the visitor and host sit or kneel down and commence the greeting ritual. Any visitors are typically offered something to eat or drink, and if visiting close to a mealtime they are encouraged to stay and are given food. These displays of hospitality and respect for the visitor would occur almost irrespective of who was visiting, whether they were generally liked or disliked.

The examples I have given in this section, of the importance of social approval for one's actions and of the ways in which villagers attempt to manage how other people see them, have hinted at my subject in the next section. In writing here about the importance of approval, I am not suggesting that this is commensurate with the achievement or pursuit of *embeera ennungi* (or another valued good). I do not mean to say that individuals only pursue their ideas of a good life in a socially approved way, nor that they always do what is expected of them. Many very clearly do not. As Jackson has shown in Sierra Leone, in the hunger for a better life moral concerns are often set aside (2011: 82). Rather, this is another dimension they must consider when deciding

how to live. Individuals have to decide whether to pursue goods that may bring social disapproval but which may further their own wellbeing, or to constrain their own pursuits in order to develop or maintain productive and positive social relations.

LIVING WELL TOGETHER

It is not good to get happiness when you are harming others
(Shaban, February 2014)

The key elements of my interlocutors' conceptions of a good death demonstrate the vital link between the individual and the social in a good life. At the final evaluation of a person's life, the most important things are kin and having fulfilled the social responsibilities towards them to leave them with *embeera ennungi*. In this respect, a good life in Nabikakala and Bukula relies on other people, both because people are an integral element of a good life but also because other people are instrumentally vital to any pursuit thereof.

In her historical ethnographic study of one Ganda village between 1892 and 1952 Richards notes how British administrators, as well as some other anthropologists working in Buganda, felt that Ganda villages were 'a set of individuals and not a community' (1966: 15). She goes on to argue, however, that her experience of the village did not reflect these sentiments, and that her interlocutors claimed considerable cooperation between villagers both in *bulungi bwansi* (the communal labour parties) and in helping each other in times of need (pp. 16-17). My experience of Nabikakala and Bukula demonstrates both sides of this. While there is clearly a valuing of working together, and in some instances villagers do so, there is a lack of it in many other cases. I was struck by the fact that I almost never saw multiple homesteads working together on their farms. Families would work together in their own garden but not with other families. When I asked people about this, many admitted there would be benefits in mutual assistance but that issues of trust make it difficult. Moses explained that even were he to arrange to cooperate with a group of friends whom he trusted, there would likely be those among the group who did not trust others and so getting them all to

agree to rotate work commitments round each other's gardens would be difficult. Nantongo, the elderly woman in Bukula, reiterated this sentiment: 'You can all work on one person's land and then when that person has benefited she can just say she is sick, or can refuse to come to work again'. Moreover, Mpagi told me that when they first moved to Bukula various neighbours warned them about other neighbours, that they are not good people. He went on to ask, 'So how can you combine these people and they work together?' This undercurrent of distrust seems to be rooted partly in the concept of *fitina* or jealousy I discussed in Chapter 2, of not wanting others to gain relative to yourself.

However, people did cooperate in some circumstances. While the *bulungi bwansi* work programmes largely ceased with the abolition of the kingship in 1966, there remain vestiges of this practice in evidence. For example, groups of men would organise themselves to repair a section of the murram roads which had become flooded. However, the event most reminiscent of *bulungi bwansi* was the roughly biannual cleaning of the well in Bukula. When, a few days after my arrival, Mpagi mentioned that he would go to clean the well with the other village men I asked to go with him. The next morning we walked the 2km or so from his house to Nabyegegezza, the site of the primary well used by residents of Bukula. This well was constructed long ago and is a spring where water seeps from the surrounding earth into a trough like hole. The water runs about ten metres to a wooden dam, pooling up behind. It is surrounded by barbed wire to prevent animals from accessing it. I was told that each house using it was supposed to provide one man, with the elderly excused, and around twelve had turned up. While it was not quite the hive of activity I had expected, with many of the men standing around chatting, all present took their turn at the work and it only took a couple of hours. They slashed away vegetation and dredged the sludge and mud from the pool of water. I felt largely useless, but they soon found a job for me heaving some of the pile of mud removed from the water farther up the banking.

The other main occasions when people come together to work are village events such as burials and other ceremonies. Whenever someone dies, the burial is usually

held the following afternoon and everyone from the surrounding area is invited (although Muslim burials are generally restricted to Muslims). In the morning of the burial, the village women will meet at the home of the bereaved and assist in the preparation of the large volume of food required to feed those attending. Some of the men may help digging the grave or erecting poles and a tarpaulin to shelter the mourners. There is a form of generalised reciprocity inherent in this, and many women feel a responsibility to help with the food preparation. Doing so is like 'banking' this assistance for when you require the assistance of others.

Finally, people would cooperate in order to achieve a common goal, in some cases putting aside otherwise quite fractious relationships. There were many sources of contention between the residents of Nabikakala and it came to seem as though every homestead had issues with every other one. Nonetheless, at certain times events coalesced to render it favourable for these homesteads to come together and at these times it appeared that relationships were good. These instances more often than not related to the Major. One day deep in the growing season, when the crops were maturing, some of the villagers captured around twenty of the Major's cattle at Isa's house, a son of Hajji Yakubu with land bordering that of the Ziwa family. Angry at the continual incursions of the cattle into their crops, members of each household in the village spent time with the captured livestock while they waited for the Major's response to their demands for compensation. Communicating through his farm manager, the Major replied that he had no money to give them. A standoff ensued lasting two days, with various villagers remaining with the cattle throughout the day and night. On the third day, the Major sent 300,000 shillings for the manager to offer the villagers. After lots of arguments, the aggrieved residents accepted the amount, despite having wanted more. Kobusingye had ensured she spend some time there and had asked Gregory, a man employed by the family as a labourer, to also spend time with the cattle. Kobusingye felt the 50,000 shillings share of the money she received was fair on the part of the other villagers, but far from appropriate compensation for the volume of crops consumed by the Major's cattle.

In light of this discussion, I will now return to the relationship between individual and social interests. This is a common theme in much wellbeing scholarship however a large number of studies, particularly from disciplines such as social psychology, attempt to categorise societies as either individualist or collectivist (for example Diener and Oishi 2004; Lu and Gilmour 2004; Suh 2000; Uchida, Norasakkunkit, and Kitayama 2004). It should be clear that attempting to categorise society in Nabikakala and Bukula as either one of these would make little sense. Pursuing aims and desires involves negotiating between individual and collective interests. At times, these coalesce and there are synergies between the individual and social good but, at others, individuals' pursuit of their desired goods may be at odds with the social weal. While some pay this no heed and largely disregard the wellbeing of others in pursuit of their own goals, most recognise the need to curtail some of their activities in order to preserve an amenable social situation. Most, for instance, do not steal from others, aware that the potential repercussions of doing so could negatively affect their future ability to live well.

These observations are unlikely to come as a surprise to anthropologists, and indeed reflect other anthropological studies of happiness and wellbeing which highlight how wellbeing is intricately bound up in our relationships with others (Heil 2009; Mathews and Izquierdo 2009a; Thin 2012b; Turner 2011). Jackson argues that wellbeing is 'dependent on an adjustment or balance between our sense of what we owe others and what we owe ourselves' (2011: 195). He goes on to say that talking of 'balance' suggests that 'life is not a problem that can be solved but a situation with which we struggle' (p. 195). People in Nabikakala and Bukula are doing just this, trying to negotiate between what they want from life, what their close relations may want, and their obligations and responsibilities to others.

Ahuvia et al. have convincingly argued that we are co-responsible for wellbeing, that 'happiness emerges as a collective and cooperative endeavor that requires both favorable life conditions and individual effort' (2015: 12). In Buganda it is similar,

and, as China Schertz argues, increasing one's standing and becoming a full person in Buganda requires interdependence, rather than independence (2014: 2). We cannot understand wellbeing and the pursuit of this, in Buganda or more generally, by focusing on either the individual or the social, but must consider it as an intersubjective, interactionist, relational process.

CONCLUSION

I elected to use the concept of dying well (*okufa obulungi*) to begin this chapter because it offers an illuminating perspective on notions of a good life and provides a way to talk in more general terms about wellbeing in Nabikakala and Bukula. The key aspects of a good death my interlocutors repeatedly mentioned were remarkably consistent – in particular *embeera ennungi* and having 'your people' around you – thus taking us full circle to my discussion of *embeera ennungi* in Chapter 1. The idea of a good death raised questions around just what it is we are talking about when we consider a 'good life'.

Firstly, 'life' can be understood as either *embeera* or as *obulamu*, the former restricted to an evaluation of the present (one's 'situation'), though nevertheless incorporating a temporal dimension in the motivation to improve it, and the latter as something enduring through time. These terms are closely related, to the extent that even villagers have difficulty articulating the difference between *embeera* and *obulamu*. Secondly, when villagers evaluate their lives what are they thinking of? Is it simply their current situation, or do they think in terms of their lives as a whole? Furthermore, are evaluations of life primarily concerned with the present, reflections on the past, or an idea of a trajectory into the future? Do people look at where they are, where they have been or come from, or where they are going? I have argued that while villagers primarily talk about how their life is in the present they are very much aware that this is a product of what has gone before and retain hopes and aspirations for how their life, their *embeera*, could be better in the future.

In light of the apparent importance of *embeera ennungi* for a good death, and linking this to my conclusion that people in the villages do have a sense of a trajectory through their lives, I then sought to question the extent to which *embeera ennungi* is the primary goal for the villagers. Despite its stated importance, other valued goods may at times compete with the pursuit of *embeera ennungi*, although the latter is particularly important as it draws together a multiplicity of valued goods. Furthermore, people are uncertain of the most effective ways to pursue *embeera ennungi* or their other aims; are limited by the available opportunities; and must also consider how their pursuit will be seen by others in the villages. Finally, drawing together the strands of the discussion earlier in the chapter, in the final section I went on to discuss the ways in which wellbeing in the villages is relational and that talking of either individual or social/collective wellbeing is too simplistic as the two are deeply intertwined.

CONCLUSION

The initial impetus for this project was a somewhat throwaway remark from Joseph Ziwa, the chairman of a small NGO (Codewe) operating in Nabikakala and Bukula, that their main aim through the organisation was to ‘help people live a happier life’. The ensuing research has sought to examine this idea, to understand the ways in which happiness, or rather wellbeing, is understood in this context, to consider whether and how it could be improved, and to discover what the people living in the villages are actually trying to pursue. Furthermore, the thesis has been concerned with the ways in which the pursuit of wellbeing affects the lives of people in these villages.

In 1988, Michael Jackson, whose work has heavily influenced my own, described his long-term concern with ‘reconciling nomothetic and idiographic conceptions of anthropology’. He goes on to explain: ‘The first seeks abstract explanatory principles, but often destroys the texture of immediate experience and actual events; the second seeks to locate meaning at the level of biography and subjectivity, but at the risk of phenomenological naivety and at the cost of elucidating general laws’ (1988: 194). I face a similar quandary. I was drawn to anthropology by a fascination for the wonderful differences in how people live their lives and understand their worlds. However, for me, the power of anthropology is not in this, but in its ability to demonstrate how, despite the differences, in so many ways people are similar.

There are few questions as immediate and central to human lives as how to live well or how to improve our lives in whichever way we deem appropriate. It was this philosophical, existential question that piqued my curiosity following Joseph’s comment. However, how do you research this question in a way so as to say something more general, or nomothetic, while at the same time preserving the particular, or idiographic, richness of different lives and different social contexts? This thesis has been an attempt to achieve this. While the minutiae of the pursuit of a good life in Nabikakala and Bukula may differ from person to person, and from those in Kampala,

in Scotland, or anywhere else, the deeper questions involved in this pursuit are often comparable. With my focus on the lives of five individuals, I have been able to retain this richness, while carefully selecting these people to ensure a heterogeneous group has allowed me to speak more generally about life in the villages. I have, therefore, been able to incorporate a number of levels of analysis – from the individual, to a more general discussion of the relevant themes at a village or regional level, to an attempt to address more universal themes in the pursuit of a good life. I believe the core concerns at the hearts of chapters 2-6 are ones faced by people worldwide, namely:

Chapter 2 – How do I/we live? How do I/we ensure my/our survival?

Chapter 3 – What do I/we aspire to? What do I/we want to change or improve in my/our life/lives?

Chapter 4 – How should I/we orient my/our efforts? To what extent should I/we focus on enjoying life in the present, or build for the future?

Chapter 5 – How do I/we get the things I/we want? How ought I/we do so?

Chapter 6 – How do I/we give life meaning? How do I/we feel part of something greater than myself/ourselves?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 was intended partly to provide some context for what followed. In this short chapter, I introduced the concept of *embeera ennungi*, which I translate as ‘a good life’ or, more helpfully, ‘a good situation’. The importance of this concept became clear as it was the most common response when I asked people in Nabikakala and Bukula how they wanted their lives to be in the future. I briefly outlined the social and material aspects comprising *embeera ennungi*, but went beyond this description to explain the benefits it brings in terms of better enabling villagers to live the kinds of lives they desire, and of making them relatively better off than their peers.

In Chapter 2 (Madina), I looked at the question of how to make a living. I used the concept of *okubeerawo*, literally ‘to be there’, as a basis to discuss how most villagers rely on combining subsistence farming with a variety of money-making strategies. Clearly, for some, this is simply a case of survival, but for most, I would

argue, it goes beyond merely surviving and is concerned with how to live well. As such, one main aim of this chapter was to flesh out the contextual information given in the introduction concerning the village economy and the activities of everyday life. The more general message of the chapter is, quite straightforwardly, that security of livelihood is vital for and prior to any pursuits of a good life. Like *embeera ennungi*, a viable and secure livelihood has instrumental value in allowing people to pursue something more, but also has intrinsic value for the increased security and comfort it offers.

The themes of Chapter 3 (Shaban) followed on directly from Chapter 2, examining the nature of aspiration and the importance of hope. I concentrated on two of Shaban's main aspirations – owning a house and land, and having a family – and looked at the individual and social salience of these aims. I explored how aspirations are shaped, before going on to argue that aspirations must be realistic and be seen to be achievable, in order to offer hope rather than despair. Finally, I briefly introduced the issue of morality in the pursuit of a good life, noting that a person must consider how their actions affect and how they are seen by others.

Chapter 4 (Kaytesi) addressed the problematic question of how to orient our efforts. How do we balance trying to live well and enjoy life in the present with investing in our future, or in the future of others? Underpinning this question is the inescapable fact that the course of life, and one's very existence, is always uncertain. Even when we invest wisely in our future, events can conspire to disrupt the outcome we perhaps feel we deserve. I looked at the dilemmas Kaytesi faces with regard to how she can and should defer rewards in terms of her livelihood, with her children, and in her desire for an afterlife. In this chapter too, I discussed preferences for more immediate gratification. The chapter concluded by introducing another running theme of the thesis – the nexus between choice and constraint.

This leads on to the issue considered in Chapter 5 (Mpagi) – how do we get good things? Because we can never fully understand the world, it can be difficult to comprehend why some things work out well while others do not. In my field site, the

dual concepts of *mikisa* (luck) and *kisiraani* (misfortune) help to understand this question. Access to good things requires effort on one's own part, but is controlled or sanctioned by God, and by an array of other supernatural entities. This raises questions around fairness and of receiving just rewards for one's efforts. Through a focus on Mpagi, I discussed ways in which to enhance access to *mikisa* and diminish *kisiraani*. Emerging from this discussion is again a moral question of how to live well, in this case how to get *mikisa*, in a socially approvable way. Finally, this chapter introduced another theme pervading the thesis – the relational nature of attempts to live well.

Chapter 6 (Kyango) built on this initial look at one's relationship with these spiritual entities as part of a wider goal of exploring the importance of continuity and connectedness. It argued that the abrupt changes in Kyango's life can be understood as part of his desire to feel connected to his ancestors, descendants, and current kin; as well as with a concern to preserve the continuity of his lineage, his clan, and the Buganda kingdom both physically and culturally. Beyond this, the chapter is concerned with a more general question of individuals' quests to feel part of something bigger than themselves, both in life and transcendentally. The chapter further develops the earlier themes of relational wellbeing and choice/constraint.

Finally, in Chapter 7, in an attempt to balance the more general scope of Chapter 1, I returned to focus on the village level. The chapter began with a discussion of the concept of 'dying well' as a way in to examine the concept of 'life' in Nabikakala and Bukula. It looked at the various ways in which life is evaluated and, in the process, explicitly linked back to the concept of *embeera ennungi*. From here, it progressed into a discussion of the pursuit of a good life in these villages. In doing so, it draws together the thematic threads of the preceding chapters. Firstly, I looked at valued goods and the ways in which different goods relate to *embeera ennungi*. Secondly, I considered enablement and opportunity, and examined the extent to which people here have, or feel they have, influence over the courses of their lives. I then turned to a discussion of approval and the ways other people evaluate one's life and efforts to improve it. Finally, the chapter culminated by returning to relational wellbeing, arguing that it is

only by recognising the importance of living well together that pursuits of wellbeing can be effectively pursued, as well as studied and understood.

CONTRIBUTION OF THIS THESIS

My work contributes to the discipline of social anthropology in three main ways. Firstly, it offers a complex exploration of positive motivation and life evaluation that builds on and complements regional scholarship pertaining to, for example, development, livelihoods, aspirations, and ‘modernity’. Secondly, it builds on an emerging interest in the anthropology of the good, happiness, and wellbeing. This development is particularly important due to growing interest in these topics in policy and political areas. Anthropology risks its voice being left behind by disciplines such as economics and positive psychology. These currently dominate wellbeing research but lack the nuance and contextualisation that ethnography offers. Finally, it has methodological implications, advocating for the effectiveness of biographical and ethnographic approaches in the study of wellbeing.

Ethnographic and theoretical conclusions

In their concluding chapter to *Pursuits of Happiness*, Mathews and Izquierdo argue that even if the only contribution anthropology makes to wellbeing research is an elaboration of how people in different socio-cultural contexts feel about and evaluate their lives, then this contribution is an important one (2009c: 259). Scholars from other disciplines, too, have called for ethnographic approaches to enhance our understanding of happiness and wellbeing (Diener and Suh 2000: 9; Suh and Oishi 2004). This has been a major motivation for my research, and in order to consider my own contributions I want to return now to the questions I asked at the beginning of this thesis.

To what was Joseph referring when he talked about a happy life? How was happiness conceptualised in Nabikakala and Bukula?

Ssanyu (happiness) in Buganda is very similar to ‘happiness’ in English, denoting a positive emotional state. However, Joseph’s comment to me was about promoting happy lives, rather than *ssanyu*. As such, he was talking about the ways in which people in the villages evaluate their lives, and how Codewe sought ways to help them live lives they consider good. The most prominent concept villagers talk about in relation to evaluating their lives is *embeera*, which I have translated as ‘situation’. *Embeera* combines both objective and subjective dimensions. In part, people judge it by material goods, including wealth, land, livestock, and the quality of houses. However, it also depends on how a person feels about his or her situation relative to others, and the degree of security and enablement it affords. These intrinsic benefits of *embeera* are what give the concept such power in the way people here evaluate their lives.

Wellbeing is social, or relational. This relationality is most obvious in the intrinsic benefits sociality or social interaction has for the enjoyment of life. In addition, people evaluate their lives relative to others, and large parts of what makes life good, such as respect, acceptance, or feeling relatively better off than others, only make sense in relation to other people. Finally, people are co-responsible for wellbeing. In Nabikakala and Bukula, villagers are only able to pursue the kinds of lives they desire through some degree of cooperation. As a result, wellbeing is also a moral concern, and villagers must take into consideration how others will see their lifestyle and their actions.

How possible is it to go about trying to improve happiness?

Most people in Nabikakala and Bukula do not purposely pursue happiness (*ssanyu*). Rather, they pursue a good life (*embeera ennungi*), which, people believe, can in turn improve their happiness. The difference is slight but important. Where happiness is an abstraction, ideas of a good life can be more concrete, and it is therefore possible to work to improve these. By creating or fostering enabling conditions, villagers can feel

they are able to improve their lives. The sense of opportunity or possibility this offers allows villagers to feel more positively about their lives.

Finally, is it good to try to improve happiness?

On the surface, attempting to improve happiness appears self-evidently good. This dictum forms the basis of utilitarian thinking, characterised by the idea that policy should aim to maximise pleasure relative to pain. However, we need to think critically about how we understand happiness, and whether and which other goods are also important to enhance. Many examples throughout this thesis suggest that individuals' actions are not always geared towards maximising their own happiness, such as chairman Lukanika's foregoing of meals in order to provide his children with a better education.

In 1974, philosopher Robert Nozick proposed a thought experiment. Imagine a machine into which you could be plugged which would give you whichever pleasurable or desirable experiences you want, which would never fail, and which would feel entirely genuine. Would you choose to plug in to it? Nozick's premise was that most people would choose not, and that therefore other things must matter aside from pleasure (1974: 42–5). I believe that it is good to try to improve happiness, but only when we understand it holistically (Thin 2012b). If we focus on attempting to raise levels of subjective wellbeing, we potentially do so to the detriment of other important ways of evaluating life. Ethnographic research offers a powerful way of exploring these alternative ways.

Methodological contribution

Finally, my research has methodological implications for contemporary wellbeing research. Quantitative methods enjoy a prominent position in wellbeing research for a range of reasons. The ability to attribute numbers to how people evaluate their lives is a powerful tool and the growing interest in these measures in policy and government is a positive development. However, aggregating data and simplifying it to quantitative measures dehumanises wellbeing. Quantitative methods will remain important and

persuasive, but it is the responsibility of more qualitatively-minded researchers to find ways to make our research interesting, compelling, and of value. My approach in this project, presenting my findings through biographical studies of a number of individuals, retains the human dimension of the quest to live well. My attempts to draw some more general conclusions aim at ensuring a relevance beyond the confines of my field site, or rural Uganda.

Ethnography, in particular, is well-suited to exploring the different ways in which people evaluate their lives and how they talk about this. The ability to explore the linguistic parameters of life evaluation, and then to directly witness and participate in how concepts such as *embeera ennungi* are enacted and understood in everyday life is of immense value to understanding wellbeing. In addition, the flexibility that the practice of ethnography allows permits the researcher to explore widely the limits of wellbeing concepts and how people evaluate their lives. This freedom is something less readily available to researchers using more structured and defined methods, such as through survey-based approaches.

THE END... AND THEY ALL LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER?

A number of strands of my life, combined with various trends in the UK and the wider world, have encouraged me to question my own priorities and how best to live well. Trends including ‘frugalism’, ‘freeganism’, and ‘decluttering’ appear to question whether accumulation and consumerism is the most conducive route to a good life. Major global issues such as climate change, water shortages, migration, and food security emphasise the interconnectedness of every part of the world, highlighting how the ways in which people live their lives affect those elsewhere. As governments around the world push for ever-greater development, progress, or growth, it is important to ask what it means to live well. Take climate change, for example, where the desire for progress is taking us to the brink of irreparable damage to the global ecosystem, a consequence that will negatively affect the ability of future generations

to live well. When we see ourselves as co-responsible for wellbeing we recognise that it is only through considering the wellbeing of others, now and in the future, that we can all live well.

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